

REVIEW

This session is all about the importance of our words and the way we use them. Our speech leaves a lasting impact on others. **What amount of harm can be done with careless or unkind words? Have you ever been the recipient of careless or unkind words? What was that experience like?**

Bob talked about the connection between the words we use and what’s in our hearts. Our words spring out of our hearts and reveal what we think, love, and believe. In a way, we never misspeak—our words always reveal who we are. **In what ways do our words provide a glimpse into what’s in our hearts? When you consider the words you use, what story do they say about your heart?**

Bob said he started charging himself five hundred dollars per word for every unkind thing he said. While we might not be able to afford that steep price, Bob’s method can still be instructive for us. **What “penalties” could you put in place to keep yourself from using unkind words with others? Who could you recruit to hold you accountable?**

Many times, our unkind words are responses to what others have said to us. Instead of responding harshly, Bob encouraged us to be gracious, patient, and kind. **What does it look like to give others the benefit of the doubt in conversations? How might your relationships change if you resolved to respond to unkind words graciously?**

Our words directly affect our Christian witness, both positively and negatively. When we use harsh or unkind words, we inaccurately portray what Christ is like. **When you think about the way Jesus spoke with others, what words come to mind? What can you do to better follow the example of Jesus?**

Bob said following Jesus “means a life of being constantly misunderstood.” **In what ways are followers of Jesus often misunderstood? For what reasons?**

Being misunderstood, of course, is rarely pleasant, and it’s not something we’re to seek out. But Bob argued that it’s something we should get comfortable with because we, like Jesus, will often be misunderstood due to our faith.

What will it take for you to grow more comfortable with

Horizontal lines for writing.

being misunderstood? What can you do to respond with love and kindness when you are misunderstood?

One of the most effective ways to keep ourselves from using unkind words is simply to pause and refrain from saying anything at all. **Do you find it difficult to exercise restraint during a conversation? Why, or why not? What can we do to slow down and think before we speak?**

Words are powerful; they can be used for good or for bad, and their impact can last for years. To make this point, Bob talked about his baseball coach and the positive impact his words had on Bob’s life. **Do you have anyone in your life who’s spoken affirming words over you? In what ways did their words affect your life? What would it take for you to use affirming words like that in someone else’s life?**

What could change if you sought to speak affirming words to everyone you meet?

Bob encouraged us to affirm others as often as possible because “people will become who we tell them they are.” Affirming words have the power to transform people. **Who in your life needs affirming words spoken over them? How can you use your words in that person’s life to bless them?**

Lined writing area with 20 horizontal lines for student responses.

BIBLE EXPLORATION

One of the clearest indicators of the vibrancy of our faith and the health of our heart, as Bob suggested, is our words. Jesus himself spoke about the connection between our words and the state of our hearts. Read Luke 6:43–45.

In this passage, Jesus uses the image of a tree and its fruit to communicate the connection between our hearts and our words. Just as a good tree produces good fruit and a bad tree bad fruit, so a good heart produces good words and an evil heart produces evil words. **Using tree imagery, how would you describe the state of your heart? What kind of tree are you? How healthy is that tree?**

What are some of the characteristics of “good” words? What are some of the characteristics of “bad” or “evil” words?

Verse 43 states that “A good tree doesn’t produce bad fruit.” And so it is with us and our words—a good heart does not produce evil words. Of course, Jesus’s words aren’t meant to suggest that we’ll never falter. We are redeemed sinners and therefore sin with our use of words at times. But the general pattern of our words should be reflective of a redeemed heart. **What is the general pattern of the words you use? Are your words kind or harsh? Loving or hateful? Affirming or degrading? To what degree have your words grown more reflective of your redeemed heart over the last year?**

Jesus says in verse 44 that “each tree is known by its fruit.” While this principle can help us assess our own spiritual condition, it’s also a reminder that *others* will know us by our fruit. Your words create a picture of your character and of the God you trust. **If you surveyed the people closest to you, how do you think they’d describe you? How would the restaurant servers, baristas, grocery checkers, or co-workers you’ve interacted with recently describe your words?**

What could you do to be more mindful of how you speak to others?

It’s impossible to address the topic of good and bad fruit, or good and evil words, without referencing the role of the

Horizontal lines for writing.

Holy Spirit. We cannot be the kind of “good person” that Jesus references in this passage without God’s intervention. For Christians, God does intervene by sending the Holy Spirit to dwell in our hearts, transforming us from evil to good, and bearing good fruit in us. **Do you find it difficult to produce good fruit? In what ways does it encourage you to know that the Holy Spirit will help you bear good fruit? How is he producing fruit in you right now?**

The words we use, whether good or bad, are the fruit produced by our hearts. Kind and truthful words that build others up flow from a spiritually vibrant heart; unkind and degrading words flow from a spiritually withered heart. **What practices could you put in place to cultivate a spiritually vibrant heart? Who could you ask to hold you accountable for speaking kind and good words?**

It's easy to speak so abstractly about our words that we forget that they have a real impact on people. They can leave a lasting impression and should be used with great care. **Who are the people in your life that need to hear kind words from you? What could you say to them that would encourage and affirm them?**

LAST WORD

Words are powerful. A harsh word spoken can leave its mark on someone for a lifetime. And the same is true of a kind and timely word—it can influence us for the rest of our lives.

The Scriptures repeatedly command us to speak words that are kind, gracious, affirming, and true. Let’s take Bob’s encouragement seriously: “See who people are becoming and speak that over them. Speak words of affirmation.” When we do so, not only will we be more like Jesus, but “more people will find Jesus in our words.”

DEEPER WALK

Pray: Pray that God will give you restraint in conflict and words that are kind and gracious that build others up in the heat of an argument.

Assess: Take a few minutes to reflect on your day and all the words you spoke. Assess whether the majority of your words were affirming or not. Take into consideration the posture of your heart as you spoke those words. Did your words represent those from a “good tree” or a “bad tree”? Make an honest assessment and take what you discover to God in prayer.

Affirm: Make it your goal to speak one affirming word to one person you encounter today.