

RUMOR ALLEGE  
SLANDER UNDERSTAND SAY  
CONVERSE DECIDE RECALL INTRIGUE PROCLAIM  
CHITCHAT WHISPER VOCALIZE CHAT SHOUT HEAR

# THE POWER OF WORDS: TALKING & LISTENING

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DISCOURSE UTTER DECLARE MURMUR EXPRESS  
GOSSIP LISTEN VERBALIZE CHATTERBOX MUTTER  
CONVEY SECRET DISCUSS ARTICULATE

# Introduction

Today we come to the end of our short, six-week series on *The Power of Words*. We have seen that on the basis of all that Christ has done for us in securing our salvation by His atoning work on the cross and His resurrection from the dead, the Apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, thought it important to raise the issue of how we speak to one another. He not only emphasized the general way in which we are to treat one another, but gave specific commands to the Ephesians – stop lying to one another, control your anger, quit stealing, don't grieve the Holy Spirit, get rid of bitterness, be kind to one another, etc. In just twenty-two words (Greek), he succinctly captured how God expects us to use our tongues in our relationships with one another.

# Introduction

Perhaps when we began this series, we were not as aware that the Scriptures devoted so much content to the many ways in which we use our tongues in conversation with others. Nor, perhaps, were we as keenly sensitive to the exponential power that words carry with them. On the one hand, as we noted, our words can produce lasting effects - either building up people or doing irrevocable harm and damage in the hearts of those who hear what we say. At least for me personally, these texts of Scripture have convicted me of my own sin and reminded me of my responsibility to use my tongue for the glory of God and for the good of all of His image-bearers. It is sobering to hear Jesus say that “every careless word that men shall speak...they shall render account.”

# Introduction

Solomon took us further in our understanding of the human heart and taught us how “a man of understanding” – someone with wisdom - might gradually descend into the depths of another person’s soul in order to know him or her more fully. By careful listening and sensitive probing, we may discern their “need of the moment,” whatever it is, and use our words to edify them so that they are strengthened and encouraged to walk closer with God and go about their Father’s business with renewed interest and vigor. As we saw last week, not everyone is qualified to descend into another’s well. We must recognize the personal traits we need in order to prepare for making the slow descent. Then, the question is: What do we say?

# God's Instruction on the Use of Our Tongues



“Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear” (Eph. 4:29, NASV).



# Looking for *The Need of the Moment*

- As we noted earlier, the word *need* in our text means *lack, want, difficulty, necessity*.
- The second half of verse 29 is best translated as “that which is good for the edification of the need” (Martyn Lloyd-Jones). In other words, our response must fit the occasion – the need in the other person.
- We must always remember that our goal must be love. “Our task as stewards of the word begins and ends in love. Loving language means cherishing it for its beauty, precision, power to enhance understanding, power to name, power to heal. And it means using words as instruments of love” (Marilyn Chandler McEntyre).



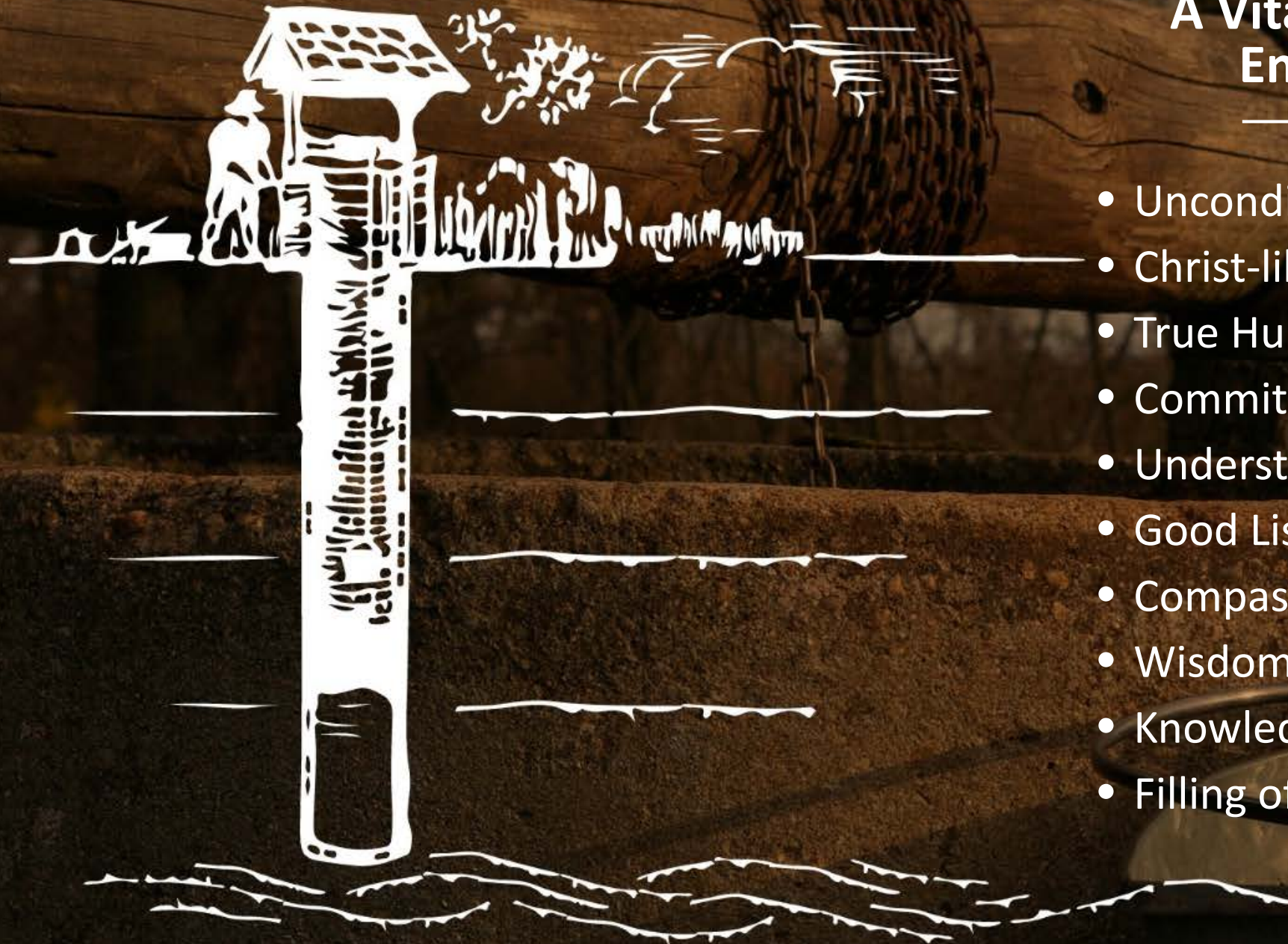
# Taking the Time to Assess the Need

“We do not just talk and talk and talk; we do not merely make our correct statements. We have to learn to understand other people and their needs. And we should be so anxious to help them that we take time, we meditate, we think, we feel our way, we see the position and then we apply the necessary and the appropriate word. It demands great wisdom, great understanding, great patience. Do not be unfair to people, do not expect them to be what they are not. Our business is to take people as they are and to try to bring them from that one position to another. So let us be careful that our word, our good word of edification, shall always fit the occasion and be appropriate for whatever circumstances apply in each individual case” (Lloyd-Jones).

## A Vital Checklist Before Entering the Well

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- Unconditional Love
- Christ-like Character
- True Humility
- Commitment to Confidentiality
- Understanding of Secrets
- Good Listening Skills
- Compassion
- Wisdom & Discernment
- Knowledge of the Word of God
- Filling of the Holy Spirit





# Discovery in the Well: Identifying Needs

- The person is struggling with unbelief and doubt.
- The person has experienced a broken relationship and is in pain.
- The person is being severely tempted to sin against the Lord.
- The person is confused about an impending decision.
- The person has not been able to forgive someone who hurt them.
- The person is angry and resentful.
- The person is struggling with sadness or depression.
- The person has lost a loved one and is grieving.
- The person is filled with shame and guilt.

# Discovery in the Well: Identifying Needs

- The person is struggling over their financial situation.
- The person needs help with their marriage.
- The person does not understand how to be filled with the Holy Spirit.
- The person is looking for a recommendation for a book to read.
- The person is trying to discover their life purpose.
- The person is struggling with an illness.
- The person is full of fear, worry, and/or anxiety.
- The person is in intense spiritual warfare.
- The person needs to be corrected.

# Discovery in the Well: Identifying Needs

- The person wants to learn how to practice spiritual disciplines.
- The person wants help in studying and understanding the Bible.
- The person is living in sin and is unrepentant.
- The person wants to develop a biblical worldview.
- The person needs wisdom regarding raising children.
- The person wants to know how to develop godly habits.
- The person needs help with business.
- The person is unsure of his/her spiritual gifts.
- The person is in need of a friend.



# An Observation by Paul David Tripp

“The church is full of people dealing with the effects of sin, people who are not fully formed into the image of Jesus Christ. The church is full of people who have lost their way and don’t even know it, who haven’t made a connection between their daily problems and the transforming grace of Christ. Everywhere you look, you will find couples who are struggling to love, parents who are struggling to be patient, children who are attracted to temptation, and friends who battle the disappointments of imperfect relationships. This is 100 percent of the church’s membership!”

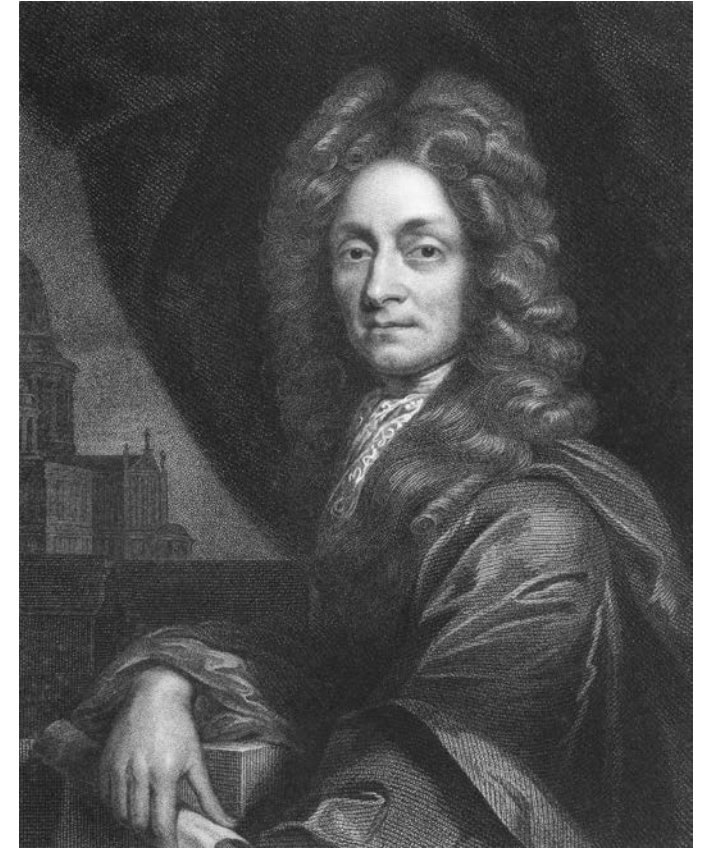


# An Observation by Larry Crabb

“I have strong reason to suspect that Christians sitting dutifully in church congregations, for whom ‘going to church’ means doing a variety of spiritual activities, have been given resources that if released could powerfully heal broken hearts, overcome the damage done by abusive backgrounds, encourage the depressed to courageously move forward, stimulate the lonely to reach out, revitalize discouraged teens and children with new and holy energy, and introduce hope into the lives of the countless people who feel rejected, alone, and useless. Maybe ‘going to church,’ much more than anything else, means relating to several people in your life differently. *Maybe the center of Christian community is connecting with a few.*”

# The Possibility of Misunderstanding

“Back in 1675, some nine years after the terrible fire in London, Sir Christopher Wren himself laid the first foundation stone in what was to be his greatest architectural enterprise – the building of St. Paul’s Cathedral. It took him thirty-five long years to complete this task, and when it was done he waited breathlessly for the reaction to her majesty, Queen Anne. After being carefully shown through the structure, she summed up her feelings for the architecture in three words: ‘It is awful; it is amusing; it is artificial.’”



**Sir Christopher Wren**

1632-1723

# The Possibility of Misunderstanding

“Sir Christopher Wren’s biographer said that on hearing these words, he heaved a sigh of relief and bowed gratefully before his sovereign. How could this be? The explanation is simple. In 1710, the word *awful* meant *awe-inspiring*, the word *amusing* meant *amazing*, and the word *artificial* meant *artistic*. What to our ears might sound like a devastating criticism were in that time words of measured praise.”



St. Paul's Cathedral, London

# Counsel for *A Man of Understanding*

1. Fully listen (verbal and non-verbal data)
2. Acknowledge that you have heard them (validate their experience)
3. Ask questions for further clarification of the need (draw them out)
4. Summarize what you have heard (ensure accuracy)
5. Ask open-ended questions (fill in missing information)

wherefore  
whence  
whether  
whom  
how  
what  
which  
where  
when  
whither  
whose  
who  
why



# Use Kipling's *Six Honest Serving Men*



**Rudyard Kipling**

1865-1936

I keep six honest serving men  
(They taught me all they knew);  
Their names are What and Why and When  
And How and Where and Who.

“The Elephant’s Child” from *Just-So Stories*



Acquaintance

Casual

Close

Intimate





# Principles of Ministry in the Well

- Focus on the person, not just the presentation problem. “Biblical personal ministry certainly includes problem-solving, but it must be person-focused. God’s work of change certainly involves changes in situation and relationship, but it has radical personal transformation as its core goal. What is their experience of the problem? (e.g., “fear, anger, guilt, anxiety, hopelessness, aloneness, envy, discouragement, desires for vengeance, etc.; Paul David Tripp).
- Battle for another person’s soul. Where are the critical battles?
- Pray without ceasing and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you and to the person to whom you are ministering what He wants you to say.



# Principles of Ministry in the Well

- “Never pretend things are better than they are” (Crabb).
- Seek to discern what the Lord is doing in your friend’s life. Look below the surface and pray that He will reveal it to both of you.
- Encourage your friend to completely surrender to God’s will and to pursue his/her relationship with Christ.
- Recognize that the “core battle in everyone’s life is to relate well to God, to worship him, enjoy him, experience his presence, hear his voice, trust him in everything, always call him good, obey every command (even the hard ones), and hope in him when he seems to disappear. That’s the battle the community of God is called to enter in each other’s lives” (Crabb).



## Larry Crabb on *What Makes Words Helpful?*

“The question the helping person will necessarily ask is, ‘What makes words helpful?’ or, ‘What are helpful words?’ Should helping people listen, offer advice, provide reassurance, quote Bible verses, pray, exhort different behaviors, empathize, probe into forgotten memories or buried pain, interpret the meaning of certain actions and tie them to internal choices and external influences?”

“The question is, ‘What words will help?’ But to answer that question, we must first ask another: ‘What needs helping that words can do something about?’ Are there repressed emotions that *uncovering words* can surface? Are people indifferent to their responsibilities and



## Larry Crabb on *What Makes Words Helpful?*

therefore in need of *rebuking words*? Are they confused about what to do and looking for words of wise counsel, for old-fashioned good advice? Do our problems stem from forgetting that God cares and that a few other people do too? Are *encouraging words* the most helpful? Or are people empty and in need of receiving what words can pour into their souls? Are *pouring words* the answer?"

"A healthy community is built on *friendship*, on people who are committed to the art of caring engagement, an art that only the gospel makes possible in its richest form."



# *Words* by Jane Clowe

In the beginning was the Word.  
Then came the Fall, fallen words,  
Billions and billions of them;  
A deluge of despair  
In a valley of verbiage,  
A tidal wave of vain philosophies,  
Attempts to communicate  
The deepest longings  
Of the human heart,  
The lost soul.

Words are nothing, intrinsically.  
They have no power of their own.  
Impotent, they lie there, detached and alone.  
Like dead fish strung on a fisherman's line  
Are columns of words in a lexicon.  
They need to be spoken, written and heard,  
To become again an enlivened word.



# *Words* by Jane Clowe

Words can be weapons that rip and tear,  
Leaving a wounded soul to repair;  
Or better, a balm that heals and soothes.  
It all depends on how they are used.


Words can be cunning, crafty and mean,  
Like a hunter's trap, laid unseen,  
Waiting to snare a guileless prey,  
Ready to pounce, whatever we say.

Words can be warm and full of grace,  
Lighting a smile on the dourest face;  
Words of compassion, spoken in love  
Exquisitely formed – like wings on a dove.

Words, all the words, ever fashioned by men  
Will suddenly come to a prophesied end,  
Swallowed by God's consuming flame;  
Leaving but One Invincible Name:

Jesus,  
The Incarnate Word





Wisdom, like an inheritance, is a good thing  
And benefits those who see the sun.

Wisdom is a shelter  
as money is a shelter,  
but the advantage of knowledge is this:  
that wisdom preserves the life of its possessor.

- Eccles. 7:11-12