

Speaking First vs Thinking First

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[0 : 00] The irony is not lost on me that I have been asked to teach on a passage that says don't be a teacher. And the irony is also not lost on me that I've been asked to speak on speaking and I'm a very chatty person.

But when I came before the Lord with this passage, which is quite stark and challenging, I did feel God speak to me, oddly enough, about the Green Cross Code.

Can anybody remember the Green Cross Code? What were the four things that the Green Cross Code told you to do? Stop, look, listen, think.

Think was the last one. And so my word this morning is based on those four tenets of the Green Cross Code.

And as I unpack that with the Lord, obviously the Green Cross Code was a campaign to teach road safety aimed at preventing pedestrians from being hit by cars when crossing the road.

[1 : 17] And I just felt the Lord say to me that actually James is teaching us how to avoid car crashes in our relationships, collisions that are caused by the tongue.

James describes the tongue as a small but powerful part of the body, like a bit, a small bit in a large horse's mouth.

It always amazes me how huge horses are. And I always think, oh, they're lovely. But when I get near one, they're quite scary. But a little bit in their mouth can steer them where the rider needs them to go.

The same with a little rudder on a huge ship. That little rudder can turn that ship wherever it needs to go. And a tiny spark is able to start a very destructive fire.

These are vivid metaphors with very strong images of the power of the tongue to steer our lives and to destroy relationships if they're not kept under control.

[2 : 31] And James talks a lot about what we use our tongue for. And he says in it, and David read it so well, and actually emphasised this part that no man is able to tame the tongue.

And yet that's exactly what James is asking us to do, isn't it? To tame our tongue. So I brought that to the Lord. I'm like, what's the point of putting someone in there and then asking us to do it when you've told us we can't?

And I felt the Lord speak to me. It struck me that the reason the tongue is so difficult to control is because the tongue is actually subject to our heart.

We know this because the Lord tells us himself. For example, in Matthew, the Lord tells us that the mouth only speaks what the heart is full of.

The Lord told his disciples that it's the things that come out of a person's mouth that come from the heart.

[3 : 40] They're the things that defile a person. Not what we put in, what we allow out. And so I realised that actually, if we're looking at taming our tongue, what we really need to do is work on our heart.

We need to make sure that our hearts are clean and pure and soft before the Lord. And this is where I believe the Lord said we can do this by using those tenets of the Green Cross Code to stop, look, listen and think.

And the title I was given was Speaking First versus Thinking First. I'm a speaker. I do think, but I think in private, in public I speak.

Some people speak to think. Other people think to speak. And I'll unpack that in a short while. So the thinking part of this sermon is what we need to do to guard our heart, to keep our heart clean, which then automatically affects how we use our tongue.

And in order to get to the thinking part, we need to stop, look and listen. The reason we need to stop is, I mean, it's quite obvious really, isn't it?

[5 : 21] It's a very simple word. We need to stop before we just open our mouth and blurt everything that, you know, comes into our head. And Proverbs 17 tells us, Even fools are thought wise if they keep silent, and discerning if they hold their tongue.

So in the heat of the moment, whether it's coming out of, you know, a heated emotion, or whether it's just you wanting to give your opinion to someone, who perhaps doesn't even want your opinion, and may not have even asked it in the first place, it's really good practice to just stop and think, Do I need to speak at this moment in time?

Ecclesiastes tells us that there is a time to speak, but it also tells us that there is a time to be silent. So I just want to encourage all of us to keep that 10 second rule, they say, don't they, count to 10. And just hold your tongue before you blurt something out that might cause damage, because once you've said it, you can't take it back. Something that will cause you regret and pain to the other person.

What we need to remember is that the power of life and death are in the tongue. And what we're aiming to do is use our tongue to create life.

[6 : 50] And if we stop first, that would just give us that little bit of space to assess, Is what I'm about to say the right thing?

Whilst you're holding your tongue, take the time to just take a second look at the situation. So this is look. Just check whether you have a correct understanding of the situation and the circumstances you find yourself in and what's actually happening around you in the person's life.

So me and my husband have been speaking a lot lately about how it's easy to take offence at something someone else has said, but what you can't actually see, or perhaps you don't know, is that they're speaking from a place of pain.

They might not be meaning to offend you, but they're speaking out of their own pain. If we stop and think for a moment and then look and assess that situation again, that could save a lot of heartache for a lot of people.

If we look and we just realise, actually, they're hurting. Or it could be even something as simple as, you come into church, you say hello to someone, and they don't say hello back.

[8 : 14] And instead of getting offended, you might not have noticed that they've just stubbed their toe, that they're hurting, and it just hasn't entered their head to respond to you. Obviously, it goes from something tiny to huge circumstances that can cause big rifts in families, in churches, in workplaces.

And if we're able to just take that step back, to stop before we add our two pennies worth, to look at the situation again and consider all the factors, that might change the way we respond.

Remember that nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. He is always looking. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account, Hebrews says. It's easy to assume that it's always the other people that will have to give account for the things they've said that have hurt us. But we have to remember that we are under God's watchful eye as well, and we will also give account.

So when we've stopped and looked at the situation afresh, then I want to encourage us all to listen. We so often want to have the first word and the last word, don't we?

[9 : 40] I've got four children. A couple of them are very much like me and want to have the last word. So there's a lot of talkers in our house. But James advises us that everyone should be quick to listen and slow to speak.

That's in James chapter 1. It's like he's setting up the whole premise of his book. And I'm sure that you've heard the saying before, that God gave us two ears and one mouth to remind us that we should listen twice as much as we speak.

If we listen, we not only listen to the things that we've been able to observe happening, but we listen to the heart of the other person and the situation.

But we can also listen to the Spirit of God and see what God wants to say in a circumstance and in a situation. What do you want to say, Lord?

What word do you want to bring? Even a rebuke from the Lord is encouraging and loving and gentle. We are wise if we choose to listen first.

[10:57] And so lastly, we think. If we've stopped and looked and listened, what we're actually doing is we're giving ourselves time to think.

Think before we rush in and think before we speak. And the thing I said at the beginning about some people speak to think, some people think to speak.

What I mean by that is that some people speak before they think and they're doing their thinking while they're speaking, which is like me.

I'm a verbal processor. So I barely have a thought in my head unless it's actually come out of my mouth first. And I've heard myself say it.

And then sometimes I'm like, oh yeah, that's what I think. And other times I'm like, I don't think that at all. What did I say that for? But I have to hear myself say it first.

[11:56] Other people are the opposite. They think before they speak. And weirdly enough, I'm married to one of those. We're completely opposite. And it's different for each person.

So the speakers like me, what you often find is that you're speaking out your thoughts and you're adjusting your thoughts as you're speaking. And that's quite confusing for the people you're speaking to.

So Nigel will say to me, but you said, and I'll be like, but that's not, I didn't mean it. I was just working it out myself. And then for me and for people like me, the opposite can be frustrating.

People who think things through to the death before they'll actually commit and speak. That can be really frustrating. And frustrating for the person that is like that.

Because by the time they've got all their thoughts together, the people like me have got bored and fed up of waiting and moved on in the conversation. And so the thinkers get lost.

[13:00] And Nigel's always saying to me, you need to speak in smaller sections so that I can, I know when I can interject because, you know, I'll talk about 20 things in one go and he's still thinking about the first thing.

So we have to really learn how to communicate with each other, how to allow each other that time and space, not only to be who we are, but to take into account who the other person is as well.

Obviously, you don't get opportunity to do that in every single relationship you have. But to be aware of those things helps us in the way we use our tongue.

Because what it's doing mainly is addressing the issues of our heart. So this conversation isn't all about me. This conversation needs to make room for the other person as well.

Whichever we are, it's always good and wise to think before speaking, at least enough to check the following.

[14:16] The word think is obviously spelt T-H-I-N-K. So ask yourself, is what I'm about to say true?

Is it helpful? Is it inspiring? Is it necessary? Is it kind? And in case you hadn't realised, that spells the word think.

T, is it true? Proverbs tells us, the Lord detests lying lips, but he delights in people who are trustworthy.

It's really easy to exaggerate, isn't it? Just to embellish a story a little bit. So the other week I was in college and I was telling a girl, oh, I spent all day Saturday working on an essay.

And I just immediately felt this check in my spirit. And I stopped and I said to her, that is a lie. I said, I actually worked till about 11.30 in the morning.

[15:29] But I had been up at five. So I had done a good chunk of work. And it kind of felt like all day to me. But I thought about it. And I thought by quarter to 12, I was down in the kitchen having a cup of tea.

I'd finished. And I said to her, that was a lie. I'm so sorry. I didn't work all day. I worked till about half 11. And I felt the need to confess. And just those little things I've started to be aware of, ways that we think, oh, you know, we're not lying.

But we're just, we're not actually telling the truth. And obviously, the extreme of that is spreading rumours and gossip and stuff that is not yours to tell.

So ask yourself, is it true what I'm about to say? Or is it just your version of events? Is it helpful? Proverbs also tells us, a gentle answer turns away wrath.

But a harsh word stirs up anger. Is what you're about to say helpful in itself? And is the way that you're saying it helpful?

[16:43] If you're able to tell the truth, which may be quite challenging, but if you're able to say it in a gentle way, the Bible tells us that turns away wrath.

But a harsh word just stirs up anger in the person that you're speaking to. So ask yourself, is it true? Is it helpful? And is it inspiring?

We read in Proverbs, a word fitly spoke and in due season is like apples of gold in settings of silver. That's such beautiful imagery. Apples of gold in settings of silver. That's inspiring. That imagery. Is what you're about to say inspiring to somebody? Because the word says that your word, if it's right and appropriate and in due season for that person, then that's exactly what it will be like, like giving them apples of gold in settings of silver.

[17:49] Is what you're about to say true, helpful, inspiring? Is it necessary? Proverbs tells us, whoever keeps his mouth and his tongue keeps himself out of trouble.

That's such good advice, isn't it? It's so easy to get yourself into trouble by the things that you say. I've got two daughters and two sons and the oldest daughter and the youngest son are very similar. They're like their dad. They're thinkers. They weigh up a situation before they say anything and they really make good, wise judgments about when it's better to just keep quiet.

The middle son and daughter are like me. They're extrovert socialites who want to talk all the time and won't shut up for anything.

So the older daughter, she's always saying, oh, the younger one's your favourite. And I'm trying to teach her, she isn't at all, but the younger one has the wisdom to know when to just back off.

[19:07] Whereas the other one, she has to have the last word all the time. And because she's very similar to me, I want to have the last word. So we go at each other and I try to teach her, it's just wisdom.

Truly she's just learnt the wisdom to say, do you know what? I can tell her mum's not in the right mood for me to ask her that. So I'm just going to go back to my room and I'll ask her at a later date. Is it necessary what you're about to say or would holding your tongue just keep you out of trouble? And lastly, is it kind? Proverbs tells us, anxiety weighs down the heart, but a kind word cheers it up. There are so many times that we see people weighed down with anxiety and it's really easy to feel irritated by someone else's anxiety because when they're anxious, they're not behaving toward you the way you want them to.

But instead of being irritated with them, how beautiful would it be to just find a kind word to lift some of that anxiety off them, a kind word to cheer their heart.

[20:29] So as we stop and just weigh up the situation, looking at what's going on, listening for what the Holy Spirit might want to say in a situation, that creates us time to think, is what I'm about to say true, helpful, inspiring, necessary and kind.

And as we do that, what we're automatically doing is checking the state of our heart. When we don't do those things, it's easy to let all the other stuff come flowing out.

The bitterness, the anger, the jealousy, the resentment, the frustration, the tiredness. That's what comes out of the heart, causes the mouth to speak damaging and hurtful words and destroys our own life.

Because in that passage in James, that's what James talks about, that the person who can't control their own life defiles, defiles, the person who can't control their own tongue defiles their own life as well as potentially destroying and damaging others.

So I just leave that challenge with all of us that in wanting to tame our tongue, let's look honestly at God in our heart and thinking on the things that are in our heart, allowing the good stuff to come out that then affects the way we use our tongue for the better to build up, to edify and to encourage one another in the Lord and not only each other but the people out in our world and in our lives like the Lord does for us.