

In our information age having the right information at the right time is vital to having a good life. From our working world of knowing what consumers want or the even better scenario of knowing how to create demand from consumers, to our personal lives of knowing how to navigate relationships, we see having the right information as the necessary tool to the life we want. In living a modern, information-oriented life our words become invaluable assets, but for them to be useful to us the idea of what words are and how they should be used must be manipulated. Let us spend some time this week looking at words and truth.

Day 1

Words and Reality

Take a close look at any advertising agency, public relations firm, or political press conference and at its heart you will find the modern idea that words are malleable to suit our intentions while at the same time they have the power to create reality. With the right command of words, the world can be ours because words themselves are the tools that will create that world. We have the power through words and the instruments of broadcasting those words to influence perceptions, manipulate reactions, and to shape thoughts and feelings. Since words are the medium of our thoughts, the ability to use words and control information becomes the ability to control the minds of others and to get what we want out of life. But do words really create reality? We have already learned that God's words indeed create reality. In Genesis 1 and 2 we learned that God created all physical reality with his words, but that Adam did not have this ability. Adam's job of naming the animals involved looking at the result of the word of God and putting the proper word to it. Adam's job was therefore not to create reality with his words but to discern the word of God by looking closely at it and learning the arts of perception, discernment, and wisdom in discovering the character of God in the reality He created. The book of Proverbs talks largely about the ability to see the word of God in what is made. Take some time to read and meditate on these proverbs this week: Proverbs 6:1-15; Proverbs 24:30-34; Matthew 6:25-34 (Okay, not a proverb).

Day 2

Truth and Freedom

In John 8:31-32 Jesus tells us that the truth will set us free. In fact, throughout the Bible there is an emphasis on the beauty and goodness of the truth. It is enshrined in the ten commandments admonition not to bear false witness as well as in several proverbs such as 12:19. This seems so obvious to us as to be not worth consideration but if we look at the modern world there is a strong belief that the truth is harmful. The idea of political correctness is founded upon the idea that the truth must be softened or denied for the good of other people. In fact, the modifier "political" in front of "correctness" is used to concede that the statement is in fact not correct, but is politically useful. The word "political" is not used in the formal sense of national politics but in the more informal sense of achieving one's goals. Although it may be the most obvious case of having no confidence in the truth, political correctness is far from the only case. For as long as can be remembered the idea of the white lie is the belief that the truth will not help a situation but a lie is superior. When called on a white lie the liar will usually respond that it is "merely" a white lie, a suggestion that there is no real harm done. But the harm done is the erosion in the belief that the truth has saving value, that the truth is to be pursued at all costs because of its great value, and the recognition that God is truth. Let us meditate today on the greatness of truth and how we might pursue it more diligently: Proverbs 23:23; Proverbs 14:25, Psalm 15.

Day 3

Plastic Words

In the late 80's author Uwe Poerksen wrote a book about a phenomenon he had witnessed all over the Western world. He had witnessed words becoming "plastic" and that this had resulted in a new language that was tyrannizing all who had the misfortune of encountering it. In this new language, words could be made to mean anything or nothing and that the proliferation of words was not used to make something clear, but instead to hide meaning behind layers of incomprehensible syllables. Since the writing of his book things have only gotten worse. We are inundated with jargon like heteronormativity, intersectionality, and my favorite, heteropatriarchy. There are a number of these terms that can be put together in endless combinations. It has gotten so bad that 3 scholars wrote 20 nonsense papers that used academic jargon to argue for ludicrous conclusions that were then published by prestigious journals who couldn't tell that it was all a joke. Although this academic and cultural trend does not affect most of us daily, it is based off the very human tendency to use words to hide the truth rather than reveal it. The most famous display of this tendency was Bill Clinton arguing what the definition of "is" is. From politicians to housewives, we are all tempted from time to time to obscure the truth with our language rather than being clear and direct. We will often distinguish this from lying, but the goal of our use of words is clearly to deceive. Let us spend some time this week watching our words and being direct and forthright. This begins by searching our hearts and intentions (Psalm 139; 1 John 1:5-10).

Day 4

Jesus is the Truth

In John 14:1-14 Jesus is nearing his death and comforting disciples who are anxious about the future. In this passage Jesus makes his famous statement that He is the way, the truth, and the life. It seems odd to us to think of the truth as a person. We are used to thinking about truth in an impersonal way and usually relate the truth to facts and figures. For many of us it just makes no sense to think of truth as a person. But what if many of our problems with truth that we have been working through this week are related to thinking of truth in an impersonal way? In this passage Jesus also tells his disciples that if they have seen Him, they have seen the Father. He is saying that God is not an impersonal force or a principle or a feeling like love. Many people who believe in God cannot bring themselves to see God as a person, and in fact wish not to see him that way. The major problem in seeing God as a person is that a person has a will, and if he has a will that will can be crossed, and if that will can be crossed, sin and punishment have entered the scene. However disconcerting seeing God as a person can be there is something important that we give up when we fail to see him as a person: Love. God is love. Because a person has intention and will that can be directed toward your blessing, and because God is a person, he can love you. And because Jesus is also a person, that means truth is a person and truth can love you. We often resist the truth because we think there may be danger or harm in it but if truth is personal and that person loves you there is nothing to fear from truth. Truth should be embraced because truth and love are united in the person of Christ.

Day 5

Truth in Love

Ephesians 4:11-16 admonishes us to speak the truth in love. We have spent the week meditating on truth and learning to pursue it. Yesterday we learned that the truth can love us because the truth is the person of Jesus Christ. But the truth loves others as well. We must learn to handle the truth in a way that loves others and yet does not stop being the truth. It is easy to pursue and use the truth as a way of getting our way. We can even use it as a destructive tool to bring pain and suffering to others, a way

to get back at them and even the score. But if you use the truth in that way, we will have no confidence that the truth loves us. Confidence comes from testing, from experience. We cannot have confidence in its love for us as we use it hatefully to those around us. Spend some time today meditating on Ephesians 4:11-16 and on how you might use the truth more lovingly to the people around you.