



3. Mind and mouth

Arrival, welcome and introduction

[8.00] Please feel free to have your video switched on or off as you prefer during our time together. We'll have some times of input in a big group like this, and other times in some small groups. As far as we are able, you will be in the same small groups as last week. In the small group discussion feel free to share as much or as little as you feel comfortable. Don't feel in any way pressured to share more than you want to. While we are in the large group it would be helpful to put yourself on mute to avoid any distractions.

Recap

[8.05] In our first week we looked at the heart and the goal of loving others. God has a goal for each one of us, which is to make us mature in Christ. While there are lots of things we might like to do for someone who is suffering, we can be involved in that work which God is doing. Then last week we looked at the most fundamental thing we can do for someone else, which is to listen. We considered the power of listening and thought about some practical steps for listening well.

At some point, however, we do need to speak. And that is the subject for this week: mind and mouth, thinking carefully about what to say to someone who is struggling.

As we think about speaking well to those in need, I love this verse from Isaiah chapter 50:

The Sovereign Lord has given me a well-instructed tongue,
to know the word that sustains the weary. (Isaiah 50:4)

That is really what we want as we think about speaking into someone's life. We want to know the word that sustains the weary. And so my prayer is that in our time together this evening we might grow in having a well-instructed tongue to know – and to speak – the word that sustains the weary.

Speaking to understand

[8.10] Our first step in speaking well to someone in need is to speak to understand. You might remember that this was one of our goals in listening as well. We listen to understand and then we speak to understand too.

This is helpful for us to remember because I know my first reaction is not to understand but to *help*. When it comes time for me to speak I want to offer advice, give suggestion, tell them what to do. In short, I want to try and fix things. Now, helping is good and there may well be things we can suggest or advise. But first we speak in order to understand.

So, what does that look like? First of all, it means speaking to encourage them that you are listening, you value what they have shared and that you want them to continue.

"Do go on" "Thank you for sharing that" "Tell me more about..." are all good phrases to start with, affirming the person speaking and gently asking them to share more.

As we seek to understand it's helpful to consider that every person is connected to four main circles: themselves, those they know, the world in general, and God himself. As we listen to understand it can be useful to think about what this person is saying about each of these circles. What are they revealing about how they think about themselves? What is their attitude to their friends or family? How do they feel about the world around them? How do their words reveal their thoughts about God?

As we then speak to understand, it can be helpful to reflect what you have noticed back to the person you are talking with, exploring with them that attitude of the heart. "You seem to have a lot of anger toward your family - have I got that right?" "I've noticed you're quite hard on yourself. Why do you think that is?" "The world seems like a frightening place to you at the moment. What do you feel you are afraid of?" "Where do you think God is in all of this?"

[8.20] Exercise



Scenario: Doris is a long standing member of the church who you have got to know quite well over the year. Doris calls you up in quite a state about a lot of different things. She speaks for a while about the people in the street who aren't wearing masks during the pandemic. She gets rather heated as she talks about this. She calms down a bit as she expresses her worry about her brother, Jim, who is having money troubles and thinking about remortgaging the family home. Doris then get quiet on the phone as she explains that she has to go to the hospital tomorrow to have a minor operation. Eventually, having listened for some time, you decide it is time to say something.



Discuss: What would you say to Doris? How can you speak to understand here?

Speaking Scripture

[8.30] So we speak to understand but we also know that our aim to help people become mature in Christ. So we want to speak God's grace and truth into their lives. That means speaking about or from the Bible to them at some point. Then comes the question: which part of the Bible should I turn to?

You've probably come across the Gideon's new testaments or Bibles that have a section in them, "Where to turn if..." you are worried, or depressed, or sad. Now those are in there for a good reason, often people who are reading a Gideon's Bible are doing so without any Christian contacts. So they may have no idea where to start and those lists can be an excellent way to help them make a start in hearing God's word.

The trouble is, they can make us think that there is a 'right' Bible verse for every situation and for every trouble. Have you ever thought that? Perhaps someone has been speaking to you about their troubles, maybe they have lost their job and you have thought, "Come on, what's the Bible verse for someone who has lost their job? Think!"

So, let me tell you, that's not quite the right approach to using the Bible with those who are struggling. For one thing, if you are anything like me, you could

never remember a complete list of 'correct' Bible passages for each situation or struggle!

But also it ignores the fact that different people will react differently to the same set of circumstances. What one person needs to hear from God's word when they lose their job might be very different to what another person needs to hear. Because their reaction, their struggles and above all their hearts are different.

What people most need, in their joys and their struggles, is the gospel. So which part of the Bible talks about the gospel? All of it! The whole Bible speaks about the gospel. That means *every passage* of God's word can be used to help someone who needs the hope of the gospel. That means, when we are talking with someone, perhaps unexpectedly, and we want to share Scripture with them, we don't need to scramble to remember a particular passage. We just need to bring to mind a passage that points them to the gospel hope and God's grace.

So, when we are speaking with someone, we can bring to mind a passage we have benefitted from recently and use that to speak the grace of God in the gospel. Now, of course, some passages are more immediately useful than others. You are unlikely to turn first of all to large chunks of Leviticus or the genealogies in Numbers to help someone who is grieving!

What makes a passage more or less useful? The answer, I think, is *accessibility*. Every passage speaks of the gospel in some way, but some are more easily accessible than others. So in choosing a passage, you want to make sure that the gospel is accessible – that you don't need to work very hard to draw out the hope this person needs, and that the connection with their circumstances are accessible as well.

Our aim, however, is not to find the 'perfect' passage for this situation. Rather it is to help them see the grace of God in the gospel, and see how the big picture of God's story speaks into their lives and hearts

[8.40] Exercise



Discuss: Think of a Bible passage you have read recently (it could be from a sermon, daily Bible reading, a book you were reading or anywhere else). How can this passage speak God's grace and truth to Doris?

Speaking in prayer

[8.50]

The other foundational thing we can do to love others is to pray for them. It is something we can all do, and something we can always do.

Sometimes, however, it can be tricky to work out what to pray with someone who is struggling. We can pray for their circumstances to change certainly and that is a very good thing to pray for. But sometimes our minds go blank for other things to pray for and we can end up praying "Lord, take this away from them. Amen."

If you read through the prayers in the New Testament, and particularly the prayers of the apostle Paul, you find something interesting. They are not primarily prayers for a change in circumstance. They are rather prayers for strength, godliness and growth in the midst of circumstances.

So let's pray that God takes the struggles away. But let's pray for the person in the midst of those struggles too. We can use our previous two points to help guide our prayers. What have we learnt about what is going on in this person's heart? Are they lonely, fearful, angry, anxious, despondent, depressed? Let's pray God's grace into those areas of their heart, as well as their situation. Do we have a verse of Scripture we have shared, or we think is relevant? Let's pray that Scripture in to this person's life. Both those things can lead to deeper prayers for a person in need.

A quick word on praying for healing. Many people we will come across in need will be those who are physically ill. While there are some who are particularly gifted in healing ministries, praying for healing is something we can all do. But we need to do it carefully and sensitively. Make sure the person you are praying for is comfortable with you praying for healing, and if in doubt, ask. Pray with confidence but don't claim healing is certain. Pray sensitively and healing is no dependent on the loudness of our prayers. Do ask if God is working but don't force a claim of healing if it's not yet present.

[8.55] Exercise



Discuss: What could you pray for Doris?

[9.00] Conclusion and prayer