

Project 20 : Verse 4 Week 5 (12th November)

PEOPLE MATTER

Connect groups are about pastoral care and discipleship. Take the time to also telephone and text regularly. **Please try make sure you take time during the month to visit at least one or two members of your group, pop in for coffee.** If you notice people are missing from church on Sundays please do make sure they are followed up. No one should be sick and without help and prayer in Net Church, no one should be struggling without support and care in Net Church. Sometimes it is the little things that we do, like a phone call, that make a huge difference.

When you ring before the study could you please encourage each person to:

- bring a Bible to each study
- Bring a notebook for the series.

The notebook is for them to jot down thoughts or questions when they read the passage before the night of the study. And to bring along to the study so that they can write down revelations, teaching etc. Connect groups are all about growth:

- Personal growth – if we are hungry we feed ourselves. As disciples we must get into the habit of studying the Bible for ourselves, feeding on spiritual food.
- Church growth – growing together as a body. That is why we will be studying the passages at the same time as a church.

THE FORMAT

To get the best out of the study please read Each study's assigned reading notes well in advance of the group and make lots of notes. Make sure you understand the answers to the questions listed. Also feel free to add other scriptures in to aid discussion in the question time:

1. Introduce the topic
2. Read the bible passage listed (ask someone else in the group to encourage group interaction).
3. Watch the media clip – make sure you have watched it plenty of times in advance of the study and think of all the potential questions that will arise from this. The link is listed and you can watch this on TV's, large laptops etc just make sure the sound is loud and you have tested the set up before the group arrive. So that during the actual connect group you just turn and push play.
4. Interaction Discussion. We have listed questions for you to promote as much discussion as possible. Interaction is key. Bring in some scriptures to stimulate discussion at different points, and encourage as many group members as possible to participate (don't allow 1-2 to dominate the answers, encourage even the quieter ones to bring forward ideas etc). You may need to think of some additional questions around the verse.
5. Always bring in the biblical viewpoint so that people fully understand what the verses ARE saying (eg what does blessed actually mean for instance).
6. As the discussion comes to a close ask the application questions in section 5 for each person to take a moment and reflect on what this study means for them personally. Make sure you have pens available for people to complete this section. This makes the study living and active.
7. Finally finish in prayer. Ask if there are any prayer needs and also pray into the study and its outworking.

LEADERS GUIDE –1 TIMOTHY 1:4 (WEEK 5 12th NOVEMBER)

Read the study notes Appendix A and B supplied on page 3-6 below – these will really help you with this study.

1. Introduce the topic.

Paul is instructing Timothy to tackle those in the church who use their speech negatively. This is something we can all be prone to. Let's unpack what Paul is teaching and how verse 4 applies to us.

2. Read

Have spare Bibles available and read 1 Timothy chapter 1 verse 4.

3. Watch the video – Week 5

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1GvbqhH-MINGk66FgiSldD75TesrZ3Kb>

4. Ask and discuss the questions (encourage as much group participation as possible)

Questions:

Paul is warning us in this verse about what we focus our speech on. What things do we debate and talk about as Christians that are pointless?

Why do we focus on controversial and 'pointless' things?

How can you tell the difference between something important for the church to discuss and something 'pointless'?

What should we be discussing or talking about? Read Titus 3:9-10, James 1:19-26, Colossians 4:6 and 2 Timothy 2:16

With all of his learning Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 2:2 'For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified'. Why does Paul say this?

What can we do in situations where the conversation becomes 'unhelpful' or 'controversial' or 'pointless'?

Jesus warns us in Matthew 12:34-37 about the words that we speak. What strikes you about what Jesus says in this passage?

In 1 Samuel 10:20-24 the Israelites chose Saul as King because of his outward appearance, why do we have celebrity Christians today?

How can you make sure your speech is helpful for building others up as instructed in Ephesians 4:29?

5. Over to you... (personal application)

- What did you find challenging in this study?
- Is there anything the Holy Spirit is highlighting that you need to work on after this study?
- Make a decision – let's not just be those who hear God's word but those who live it out. Make a decision based on this study of how you are going to walk this teaching out personally.
- Take time to read 1 Timothy 1 verse 3-5 over the next few days and really consider what you are reading. We are going to be studying verse 5 at our next connect group.

Appendix A

HOW TO TAME THE TONGUE by Scott Morton

Believers today don't pay much attention to sins of the tongue—gossip, slander, lying, exaggeration. Perhaps it's because we so mindlessly commit these “respectable sins” that we don't regard them as seriously as we do sins such as adultery or drunkenness.

Also, let's admit that bridling the tongue is tough.

When I was a child, my mother read me the storybook “Bambi,” which contained a famous line: “If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all.”

Nevertheless, I grew up speaking “rashly like the thrusts of a sword” (Proverbs 12:18). When I became a believer, I tried to follow the advice in “Bambi” by cutting back on my cutting words—behavior modification. But I discovered I was focusing on the wrong organ.

I got help from the New Testament writer James, who calls the tongue a fire, a world of iniquity, a restless evil full of deadly poison (James 3:6, 8). That's serious! James continues, saying that although many birds and reptiles have been tamed, “no one can tame the tongue” (James 3:8). And James leaves it at that—without a how-to formula!

Then James seems to switch subjects. In 3:13-18, he says that evil behavior comes from “bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart.” This heart-mouth connection sounds like the teaching of his half-brother, Jesus: “For his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart” (Luke 6:45).

Imagine if you will this diagram: A bicycle chain connecting heart and mouth. Our mouth is driven by what preoccupies our heart. Bridling our tongue means dealing with our

heart first—not merely avoiding blurting out unkind words.

Years ago a buddy and I launched a sanctification crusade to clean up our speech. We were sick of how our loose lips wounded others and boosted ourselves. I had high hopes for success—I had accountability! On the appointed morning, I rose from bed determined not to say anything bad for a whole day. Minute by painful minute I focused on what I was not supposed to say. But that evening my friend and I sadly admitted failure.

Years later, after many battles with temptation, I discovered what I had missed. James 4:7 stopped me cold: “Submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”

During my self-sanctification day, I tried to resist the devil, but I failed to first submit to God. The order is important. First submit, then resist. Though we may have momentary victory, any battle with temptation is doomed unless we first submit to God. James gives three benchmarks that check our motives.

Benchmark 1

“Do not speak against [slander] one another, brothers and sisters” (James 4:11). That's us! Why do we “speak against” fellow believers? I confess I am prone to slander when I feel insecure. In some morbid way, putting down another person helps me feel better, showing how little I understand God's love for me.

Today when I am tempted to slander, I pause and ask myself, “Do I feel secure in God's love today?” That question puts the brakes on the bicycle.

Benchmark 2

“Do not complain, brothers and sisters, against one another” (James 5:9). Over the years I have been complimented for not being a complainer. I’m grateful for the commendation—but you should hear what goes on inside.

Years ago I started “now-and-then” journaling. When I feel frustrated, I write my complaints in my quiet time journal, explaining how I feel about certain people or incidents. I end with a one-sentence prayer of surrender. The Lord can handle my ranting. By telling Him, I don’t need to tell others.

This discipline reminds me that God is sovereign over the cause of my complaints—lying politicians, annoying co-workers, late airplanes.

Benchmark 3

“But above all, my brothers and sisters, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but your yes is to be yes, and your no, no” (James 5:12). This sounds like Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 5:34-37: “Make no oath at all, either by heaven ... or by earth ... but let your statement be, ‘Yes, yes’ or ‘No, no.’”

I used to think this was about cussing, but it’s more than that. The Jews of Jesus’ day could hardly speak without invoking oaths to give their statements credibility. For example: “My camel is the fastest in the land, and if not, may I die without children!”

Similarly today, we “pad up” our statements because we don’t think we have enough personal gravity to simply say yes or no. Some people bolster their words with a “by God,” wordy exaggerations, threats or emotional displays. Padding our words shows that we do not believe God is for us. To apply this, I simply try to give short answers. Too simple? Try it.

To sum up, James says:

- I can’t tame my tongue (3:1-12)
- The problem is my heart’s motives (3:13-18)
- Humble submission brings grace—supernatural enablement to do what I must do (4:7)

Further, three benchmarks check my motives:

- Slandering (4:11)
- Complaining (5:9)
- Padding my words to bolster my sagging ego (5:12)

Where to start? Should we simply keep quiet? Proverbs 17:28 says, “Even a fool, when he keeps silent, is considered wise.” Though keeping silent lessens embarrassment, it prevents you from edifying others or speaking up in the presence of evil.

The chain connecting heart and tongue cannot be broken. For good or bad, it will always be there. But try this: Before you speak, pause and ask, “Why did I almost say that? What is my motive?” Then honestly submit: “Lord, I confess I was about to slander Mary because I am jealous of her good looks. Amen.”

This momentary silence may invite stares from your friends. Simply tell them you are confronting your sins.

“If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man’s religion is worthless” (James 1:26). This is serious!

Scripture quotations are taken by permission from the New American Standard Bible,

Appendix B

THE DANGER OF IDOLISING ‘CHRISTIAN CELEBRITIES’

by Kallie Garrett

We live in the world of followers, likes and commenters. Status, if we’re honest, is determined by numbers of shares and how many people cyber “like” us. It seems that one can actually determine how valuable they are based off the number of blue thumbs-ups they receive. A legitimate measure of success is going viral.

This social media celebrity culture has pervaded our world for a while now; it’s nothing too new. But it has begun to define the Christian world as well.

We can “follow” the daily happenings of any person we’d like, and because of that feel as if we have permission to comment on their lives. We watch twitter fights between pastors from different denominations like tennis matches, as the unity of the Church dissolves. When we disagree with one thing someone shares, we question everything they’ve ever said or done. When did someone’s worth to the Church and the Kingdom become based off their ability to navigate the murky waters of social media?

This celebrity culture that gives us the false belief that we can comment on people’s worth and lifestyle also puts these people on an unreachable pedestal of perfection. We have seen for decades the way celebrities come under scrutiny, on television and in the checkout line at the grocery store. We have begun to do this to our fellow Christians as well. With Christian leaders we not only judge their outfits, but their theology. We need to reconsider both why they are on a pedestal, and how we treat them while they are up there.

We have seen the rise and fall in popularity of many Christian celebrities. They develop a following because of books or blog posts they’ve

written, funny tweets they have shared or profound Instagram posts amassing a multitude of likes. But when fame becomes equivalent to holiness, we set them up to fail.

We should be concerned when our expectation of a Christian leader becomes more about what they can provide for us and less about who they are leading us towards. We base our faith off of a celebrity, rather than our actual God. We have created false gods in His place. We have watched people like Rob Bell be ostracized from the Church that had originally elevated them. We have observed the devastating collapse of Christian leaders like Mark Driscoll. Regardless of the why, we need to remember that we were never given a hall pass to speak of them in the negative way we so often do.

Christian “celebrity” culture has always been a reality; from the rabbis to priests to preachers, throughout Church history we have seen the way Christians tend to elevate leaders into a position of influence and power. Of course, leaders are important and their voices need to be heard above the static of the secular world. The danger comes when we idolize these leaders, placing them in a high position with unreasonably high expectations.

We also want them to be normal, everyday people. We cannot have it both ways. Celebrity gossip magazines often boast, “Stars, they’re just like us!” We want to feel like celebrities are normal, everyday people, yet when they show us their normal brokenness, we skewer them for having vulnerabilities and making mistakes. We build Christian leaders their platform and then light it on fire.

I recently heard a speaker talk about the most popular reasons people leave the Church today. He made the point that all of the reasons are simply symptoms of humanity. We are much more willing to offer grace to people outside the

Church, but inside the Church we are stingy with it. There is something to be said for holding our leaders to a higher standard; the Bible tells us that from those who have been entrusted with much, much will be required. (Luke 12:48). However, we have to remember the humanity of our leaders and be willing to offer them the grace that we so generously offer to others. We unfairly assume that people possess a level of holiness that is equal to the height of their platform.

So what is the answer? What do we do when our leaders fail us? Christian leadership has always been a tricky course to navigate, lined with broken people and needy communities. When we view a Christian as a “celebrity” and feel the right to criticize and threaten them based on what they have said, we are taking a chainsaw to the pillars of the Church. We cannot treat each other this way. Celebrity or not, we cannot put our faith or hope in a human.

We need to re-evaluate our definition of “follower.” Jesus told us that He came to serve, not to be served. Nothing about His ministry was related to fame, though fame definitely did come his way. He experienced the highs of people loving Him and coming to see Him from miles away, and the horrible treatment of people turning their backs on him and ultimately crucifying Him for His claims. Jesus called us to give up everything to follow him. This is a very different “following” than the way we follow people online. His kind of following requires sacrifice, it demands “dying to self.” In our culture today, following involves clicking a button and sharing opinions and memes. Jesus wasn’t after His own fame or fortune, which is why it never derailed Him when people disagreed or walked away. Jesus calls us to a different way of living. He uproots our understanding of what it means to “follow.” He led by service. He was never after his own glory, but worked for the “will of Him who sent me.” (John 6:38)

Here’s an important question for us to ask: Have we become a society of cowardly soldiers, sharing our heartless opinions behind computer screens?

Sure, we claim we want vulnerability, but often we condemn people when they actually practice it. We write someone off as no use to the Kingdom based off of one controversial post. I am certainly not saying that we always have to agree with one another; Jesus called out false teachers with great passion. There has to be a place for healthy discourse, an avenue for disagreeing and searching for truth. What I wish would happen is instead of public crucifixion, we would extend an invitation to the table. We would be people who welcome others into a Christian community where conversations happen face to face. We are called to be people of the resurrection, reconcilers of brokenness—and that doesn’t usually happen by writing and posting 140 characters of criticism with no visible Christian character behind it.

There are a lot of conversations today about the world around us trying to put out the fire of Christianity. In what I have seen, we are often destroying ourselves from the inside out. The watching world can sit back with a bag of popcorn and watch Christians devalue and destroy one another, until no one will be left. The way we treat one another, celebrity or not, determines the way an observing world will feel about Jesus. We need to step away from our screens and be the hands and feet of Jesus. We cannot measure the “success” of our ministry or calling based on the number of likes or followers we have on social media.

When we find ourselves disappointed in Christian leaders, which we inevitably will, we need to ask ourselves who we are actually following. Maybe we need to own the fact that we may have placed them in a position that they were never meant to hold. What if we took literally that “follow” button, and paid attention to the ways we are replacing God with His people?

We cannot follow the gospel of Matt Walsh or the gospel of Jen Hatmaker or any other Christian “celebrity,” we need to follow the gospel of Jesus Christ. Anything else will certainly fail us.