

LOOKING UP - February 22 - "Words and Bricks"

It has been calculated that the average person speaks about 7,000 words a day.

As we have been thinking about the theme of offence in our lives it is important to consider the words we use with others. Just as God spoke creation into being with his Word - our words, in a way, have power to create reality. They have the power to build someone up or tear someone down; to encourage someone towards excellence or destroy their dream; to affirm love or leave someone heartbroken; to get people working together or lead them into chaos. What are we building with our words?

Here are a few key scriptures that remind us of how God looks at the words we use...

"I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned" (Matthew 12:36-37).

"The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks" (Luke 6:45).

"If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God" (1 Peter 4:11).

"Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be" (James 3:10).

"...speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ" (Ephesians 4:15).

"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen" (Ephesians 4:29).

Right now I am looking out of my office window at new brick houses being built. Interestingly the average number of words we use in a day and the average number of bricks it takes to build a house is about the same. Bricks can either be carefully assembled to build or carelessly thrown to break. If we were to think of each word we speak today as a brick, what are we building?

Steven Amarin - First Baptist Church Tillsonburg

#devotional #bible #Jesus

LOOKING UP - February 23 - "It's Time for The Talk"

Here's an awkward question that will probably get me into a bit of trouble... What is the purpose of sex? Is it about gratification, it is about procreation? A bit of both?

In our cultural context it is easy to observe that sex is mostly about pleasure and using another person's body for our personal gratification. Not sure about this? Turn on the TV and watch a few ads that objectify the human body or consider the latest statistics on pornography. According to 2020 North American stats, roughly 80% of men and 33% of women have accessed internet porn in the last year - 50% of males under 25 access it weekly. When it comes to sex we are often taught, "if it feels good do it!". Virginity is seen as something to get rid of and abstinence as a joke. Our culture's approach to sex has left many people deeply broken and perpetually unsatisfied.

In some religious contexts it would seem that the role of sex is primarily procreation and we are taught to feel a deep sense of fear or shame around our natural desires - leaving many people with secret struggles. Again, this approach can lead to us feeling deeply broken and perpetually unsatisfied. What if I told you that on a human level sex isn't simply about gratification or procreation...what if I told you that sex was about family? What if sex was meant to build up a family by deepening the bond of marriage and bringing new life into the family? I believe this to be true.

Let me tell you about something in our bodies called Oxytocin - it is a powerful hormone that is released during things like sexual activity or even when a mother holds her newborn child - our body essentially becomes bonded to whatever triggers the release of this hormone. It is a part of our design that is meant to strengthen our connection with those most important to us. The problem comes when it is released with uncommitted partners or when it binds us to something like a computer screen. It is very difficult to unbind what this hormone binds. Sex is far more than a function of the body, like maybe sneezing; the way we experience sex and share it has a profound effect on us physically, emotionally and spiritually.

God cares about how we express our sexuality. Sex is God's good idea and a fundamental part of our design. The merging of male and female as "one flesh" is meant to reflect the likeness of God who created us (Genesis 2:24, Mark 10:6-9). Sex is meant to be honoured, enjoyed and shared generously in the context of marriage (1 Corinthians 7:5, Hebrews 13:8). However, sex will be filled with frustration and dysfunction until we honour it in its right place in building up the family.

Maybe this post has made you angry and you vehemently disagree, maybe it has made you concerned for a loved one, maybe it has led you to a place of confession and a need for repentance, maybe a conversation about your brokenness with one you trust, perhaps willingness to understand the unspoken needs of your spouse. Whatever the case, please know that God loves you and His blessings of grace, wisdom and strength are fully available to you today.

Steven Amarin - First Baptist Church Tillsonburg

#devotional #bible #Jesus

LOOKING UP - February 24 - "Somebody is praying for me"

Since I dropped a pretty heavy devotional yesterday I thought I would go easier on us today with a simple but encouraging thought...

Do you know what it is like to have someone pray for you? It feels good to know that someone cares enough to lift you up in prayer to our Heavenly Father. One of the greatest privileges of the Christian life is to connect with others who will seek God with you in prayer, to rejoice with you in your blessings and lift you up in a time of need before God. We are called as Christians to intercede for one another in prayer. Hey, if you need prayer right now send me a quick message and I will be glad to lift you up today...

But did you also know that, most importantly, Jesus himself is continually interceding for you and I? It says in Hebrews 7... *"Because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them"* (Hebrews 7:24,25).

In the eternal realm of Heaven, Jesus is not taking a break from the work of caring for us as his disciples. Until he returns he will continue to uphold us, encourage us, forgive us and intercede for us at the Father's side. He answers the accusations of the enemy with his redeeming grace and declares us justified in his finished work. He is never too busy or tired for us to call upon him in our need of his grace.

Take heart and know that someone is praying for you today - especially Jesus.

Steven Amarin - First Baptist Church Tillsonburg

.
#devotional #bible #Jesus

LOOKING UP - February 25 - "What we ask for and what God gives"

I heard something in a meeting yesterday that stuck with me: "We pray from a limited perspective but God responds from an unlimited perspective."

It got me thinking of the many times in life that I have been so certain of what God should give me. It also reminded me of how thankful I am that God has not given me everything I have ever asked for in prayer - and how often God has provided something even greater than I was seeking.

One of the reasons that God invites us to be persistent in prayer is that our desires and the things we ask of God often need refining and even correcting. Like a child screaming at their parent for a chocolate bar when they really just need a proper meal, we have a Heavenly Father who knows our needs better than we do and exactly how to meet those needs in his perfect timing.

We have all heard the saying, "Be careful what you wish for, you might just get it". Thankfully God is not petty and does not deal with us out of spite - but out of a perfect Fatherly love. His desire is not simply to give us what we want, He loves us too much to do that. Instead He provides us with all we need for our eternal good and His glory.

Consider this verse today: *"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen"* (Ephesians 3:20,21).

As you pray today, be reminded that God welcomes us with all our needs to find in Him a Father who is able to do far more than we ask or imagine.

Steven Amorin - First Baptist Church Tillsonburg

.
#devotional #bible #Jesus

LOOKING UP - February 26 - "Seeking Approval"

The interesting thing with seeking approval is that when we receive it from others we often feel a sense of accomplishment and a rush of excitement. We might find ourselves liking it so much we begin to live our life according to what people expect of us, we avoid things that might risk lowering our status or will bring a disapproving look. With our insecurities we look for validation and proof that we belong and have value. On this path we may eventually find ourselves living a life we don't really want to live and have lost our sense of identity. We may find ourselves envious or jealous of others who have more approval, spending needless energy competing with them... Not to mention the fact that people are fickle and their approval is a moving target that is near-impossible to hit. Someone once said, "If you live for peoples' approval, you will die from their rejection". I think you get the point...

Seeking peoples' approval might seem exciting for a time, but it comes at the expense of burying the unique person God created you to be. We miss out on the path of life that God has offered us - exercising the unique gifts he has endowed on us by the Spirit - the unique opportunities that we are meant to take hold of and enjoy - our vital part in the Body of Christ - the rewards of being a good and faithful servant and so on.

When Paul spoke to the church at Galatia he was upset that they had become concerned about meeting the approval of very narrow-minded religious teachers who were holding New Covenant people to Old Covenant ways. He was concerned that they had missed the point of why Jesus had come and the freedom found in the gospel. He said to them, *"Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ"* (Galatians 1:10).

If we desire true fulfillment in life we must resolve to let go of the need for peoples' approval. In fact, if we want to live out our God-given purpose in this world it will mean that we must face the harsh disapproval of others and learn to live with it. We are here in this world for a purpose and will be forever wandering if we look for it in the eyes of anyone but Jesus.

Steven Amorin - First Baptist Church Tillsonburg

.
#devotional #bible #Jesus