

Let Your Words be Few

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[0 : 0 0] Well folks, great to see you this morning. Let me encourage you to have that passage in Ecclesiastes 5 open in front of you. So important that we have God's Word open in front of us, so we can hear His voice as He speaks to us today.

And let me encourage you with those verses open to entertain a question as we begin. I wonder how many, on average, right, I wonder how many words you reckon that you speak in a day.

Right? How many words on average do you reckon you speak in a day? Just get that number in your head. And here's what I want you to do for 10 seconds, this shouldn't take long.

Share that number with the person next to you. Okay? Go for it. How many words on average do you speak in a day? Okay, so, on average, the average person, I have no idea how they work this out.

I love to think it's somebody following somebody on average, and with only those wee clickers, I'm just clicking. The average person speaks 10,000 words a day. Anybody get close to that? Some of us. So some of us will be on either side of that, because remember, this is an average.

[1 : 1 3] But when you consider 10,000 words, that is a lot of words, isn't it? And I remember when I was growing up, the BT advert that said, it is good to talk. And we kind of embrace that, don't we, as human beings?

10,000 words a day. We've got people in our lives who love to talk. Okay, I'll give you an example of this. I have a good friend, and I heard recently that the people he used to work with affectionately nicknamed him Duck Tape.

Okay? Because after spending a little bit of time in his presence, they just wanted to Duck Tape his mouth. Okay, affectionate. The guy's a legend. Okay? Affectionate. But we all know people in our lives, don't we, that love to talk.

And if you can't think of people, then it's probably you, okay? But this is our world, our human existence. We speak on average 10,000 words a day.

A lot of words, isn't it? Words, words, words, words, words, words, words. Chat, chat, chat, chat, chat, chat, chat, chat. Opinion, opinion, opinion, opinion, opinion.

[2 : 1 3] Debate, debate, debate, debate, debate. Question, question, question, question, question. Words, words, words, words, words, words, words, words. And the thing about this passage today is that we're going to zoom in on a generation of God's people who are being told to make their words few.

make their words for you now here's Solomon writing in this book of Ecclesiastes and here he is if you want to picture him he's like a good grandpa he's sitting down gathering his grandkids saying to them this is what life has taught me and he's trying to wrestle and we've seen this in opening a couple of chapters of Ecclesiastes he's kind of trying to wrestle some kind of purpose out of the things of this down here existence he was telling us wasn't he chapter 2 wisdom and power and money and opportunities and buildings and stuff and sex and relationships and what did he conclude he concluded that it was all vanity I don't have my candle up here today but if I did this is what he's talking about right the smoke that comes out of a candle when you blow it this is what he's concluding about life it's here today and gone tomorrow it's fleeting it's frustrating it's temporary every time that you think you've got life tamed that you've got life sorted in a box somehow it manages to spring out and elude you it's amazing actually let me just say that the amount of people have come up to me over the last few weeks and have said that what

Solomon is saying here about life it's really connected with our modern day living that this is what life is like under the sun in chapter 5 he kind of turns his thoughts to God and he's not just thinking about God he's watching the people around about him his generation of God's people and he's he's thinking about how they are relating and viewing God okay so here is this this man Solomon and remember who he is he was the guy that that oversaw the building of the temple this place where God said I will be there my presence will be there and and you can check this out afterwards you get Solomon's prayer of dedication in 2nd Chronicles chapter 6 and it begins with the words words Lord there is there's no God like you in heaven on earth even the highest heavens cannot contain you let alone this temple that I have built so Solomon is a guy for all his faults and he's a fascinating character for all his faults he is a man who understands the greatness of the gods who Israel worship

Yahweh and he looks out on a generation of God's people and he knows that their view of God the Lord is way too small and their view of themselves is way too big and the thing is it's how does Solomon know that well it's their words words words words words words words words they seem to be revealing what's going on in their hearts and what's going on in their hearts is they have got a very shallow view of the God that they are coming to worship and so when Solomon calls for fewer words let your words be few he's not calling for some kind of game of charades right it's not Christmas time he's not saying reduce your word count like you would do in an essay of your student you look at the word count at the bottom right what is it he's not saying get it down what he's calling for is a posture when you come before the God of the universe this is about worship and Solomon's calling God's people to embrace and to enjoy and to be transformed by a glorious picture of the matchless majesty of the God that they come to worship because there is none like him in heaven and on earth and there is no way that the highest heavens could contain the glory of this God let alone the temple that Solomon has built and he wants that understanding of this big view of who God is to filter down into every area of their lives every area not just when they come to do the religious things every area of their lives is to be saturated with a big view of who this God is so Solomon's going to say and this is our two things for this morning okay or this afternoon two things to this generation here's the first thing he's going to say he's going to say your worship is too casual your words are too casual so come with me to the text and see what he writes at verse 1 he says guard your steps when you go to the house of the Lord you see it guard your steps when you go to the house of God so he's picturing here people who are making that pilgrimage to the temple the place where God dwells in the holy of holies the place for sacrifice for sin is made where it's atoned for where God's word is taught that people are told how they should respond to who this God is how he wants them to live where prayers are offered this is the temple and Solomon says see when you go there see when you walk there you've got to watch how you walk right we do this all the time you think about it in your life you think when was the last time you watched how you walked we went to St Andrew's Beach with the girls last week and we started walking over the rocks and there's you've done this before that you look out there's seaweed everywhere there's barnacles which are going to cut your feet if you've got open feet there's seagulls flying about trying to get us get the food that we've just eaten there's rock pools everywhere arguably not my smartest move as a parent to take the girls over the rocks but tell you what see when I knew that that was there

I was watching how I was walking so the two girls in my hat I was watching how I was walking I was watching how they were walking and we do this in our lives don't we we watch how we walk those moments right that you take your time over you think about each step you're focused on what you're doing and you're thinking about where you need to be and Solomon says there's got to be exactly like that when you come into God's presence right imagine for them they're thinking to themselves hey do you know what en route to the temple en route there hey we can behave however we want it doesn't matter we can behave however we want we can do whatever we want and do you know what when we get there we'll kind of hit the switch and we'll kind of go do this kind of religious transformer thing and we'll hit the God switch and by the time we get into the temple then we'll be we'll just do it we'll just do this religious thing that we do all the time okay we know the lingo we know the right time to say amen we know the right time to raise our hands in worship we know the right amount to give we know how to do the religious things we have got this temple deal down to a T we've got it sussed and Solomon says you see it in the text he says don't be a fool you know

[9 : 42] I remember when we were young my brother and I my mum used to take my brother and I for a yearly trip to the orthodontist and what used to happen is every time we used to get there Glasgow Dental School there's a massive waiting room and what she would do we'd be sitting there she would without fail go into her handbag and pull out two toothbrushes and one of those little miniature toothpaste and she would hand them to my brother and I and she would say would you go into that toilet and would you brush like crazy okay so we would go and do it we'd go and brush brush brush like crazy gums would bleed we would do it hard and we would get into the orthodontist room and in my mind I'm thinking to myself do you know what because I've brushed like crazy that's going to mask over a whole year of astro belts and chocolate bars and iron brew bars and ice poles that we have consumed and I remember sitting there genuinely being amazed that every time the guy in the chair could see straight through it think to myself this guy is good they must have trained him well here how has he seen through this

I must brush extra harder next time I come to the orthodontist and Solomon's saying exactly the same here to this generation when they come to deal with God because this generation are treating God like he is a gullible dentist and what does he call that do you see verse 1 he calls that them coming to do the religious things he calls that the sacrifice of fools you see it verse 2 he warns them do not be rash with your mouth do not let your heart and of course this is where our words come from isn't it from our hearts do not let your heart utter a hasty word why well because second half of verse 2 God is in heaven and you're on earth so what he's calling for here is them to embrace true wisdom and true wisdom recognizes that there is a massive distinction between God and us right

God is infinite he is infinite we are finite God is immortal we are mortal he is invisible we are visible God is spirit and we are dust we are flesh God is almighty and we are weak God is all powerful and we are not God is all seeing and we are not God is holy and we are sinful God is pure and we are impure God is unchanging and we change all the time and God is faithful and we are unfaithful and on and on and on and on and on and on and on we could go Solomon says true wisdom recognizes and John Calvin used to say this as well about true wisdom that it recognizes who is the creator and who is the creature and the thing about this generation is that they have forgotten the God who they come to worship they have forgotten who he is and they have forgotten in light of that they have forgotten who they are and they come in with their empty platitudes they go through religious motions and Solomon pleads with them to draw near to God and you see in the text he pleads with them to listen and learn from this God now the word listen there the Hebrew it's not this idea of just listening it is hearing and doing hearing and doing right we see this in the New Testament as well

James talks about it all the time true faith hearing doing don't just be a listener be a doer hear and do so he wants them to adopt a posture that says Lord it's your truth it is your word that I need in my life as I see it and as I hear it in the temple and by faith as I take hold of what you have said I recognise that I so desperately need that word in my life friends let me just ask you when was the last time you thought that in your own heart I find myself daily in this place of Lord I just need your word I just need your word I just need it in my life I'm losing it I just need your word in my life it's your word that what does the psalmist say in Psalm 119 that your word is a lamp into my feet and it's a light into my path it's one of the things that we hear one of the phrases that you will hear people in Scotland say at this time of year what is it people say what are the knights doing they're fair drawn in if you're guessed here that's a Scottish phrase it basically means it's getting dark the knights are fair drawn in and one of the things that you will see is when you go into the streets you will notice a lot more cars with their lights on we were coming home last night from Dalkeith we needed our lights it was pitch black out there we need our lights you'll know this if you're driving you need your lights this is what the psalmist is saying

I need your light I need it for my path and he's calling himself Psalm 119 he's calling God's generation he's calling the whole world to see friends that the only light in this world is God's word we need his light in our lives I need your word to show me the way I need it to help me understand and I come to your word these people come into the temple not to play games they come here on their knees waving the white flag of surrender that says Lord I need your word in my life I am lost without it this is what he's calling for from this generation because their worship is way too casual and the second thing he says is that your worship is way too cheap verses 4 to 7 okay and these people are walking in there and you'll see this in the text just scan your eyes over it 4 to 7 but they walk in there and they make big vows to God right they promise that they are going to do a lot for him they pledge themselves to big big things they make big statements about what they will do for God but the thing is to see that when the time comes to make good on that word they are nowhere do you see what they say there must be some sort of mistake that's the word in the passage isn't it imagine this was imagine this is a bit like

[16:17] I don't know if you have this in your workplaces but I remember every so often there just used to be a bed of paper on my desk and it used to come around quite often and it said sponsor me right you get those like the guy in your workplace is doing a 10k for charity and he's looking for sponsorship money and it comes around and you fill it in imagine it's a bit like this okay they're sitting there imagine you sit there and you scribble down your name and you write your write the amount next to your name and you say it loud so everybody can hear it 600 pounds right and you score your name and you make sure everybody says it you think oof wow that's a generous generous vow but imagine the time comes to pay and the sheet comes in it's time to pay and you say is that really is that really my signature that G looks way too small 600 pounds see if you notice where the decimal is on that it's actually next to the 6 it's actually that 6 pounds okay you can imagine the kind of thing this is what's going on here with this generation verse 6 see when the time comes they make good on the promises that they make to God they say there must be some sort of mistake right it doesn't sound like me

I think you must have got the wrong guy that's this doesn't sound like me that's this generation again think about it what's going on behind these words what's going on is that they have got a faulty view of who this God is they are taking God and they are reducing him to how we human beings operate think about it they're failing to see him as the God of all grace and they are reducing him to our way of thinking that says that God must operate in a tit for tat basis right I scratch his back he scratches my back that's what must kind of happen here and they're using God as a way of looking good in other people's eyes and that's what they're concerned about they're not concerned about looking good in the eyes of others so this generation are known for making big promises but not following through on those promises and the thing is before we quickly let ourselves off the hook here friends how often do we make and say big things about what we will do for God and we never follow through in it we have no intention of following through in it think about the thing another way of thinking about it think about some of the things that we sing that we will do for God let me just encourage us to think about the lyrics that we sing in some of the songs what are some of the things that we are saying to God this is not casual what we are saying this is the God of the universe that we're dealing with here

Solomon says your words are way too cheap do you know how God feels about that see what he says verse 6 why should God be angry at your voice why should he destroy the works of your hands God takes this stuff seriously because if that's what you do and says Solomon verse 5 it's actually better that you don't vow and your mouth doesn't lead you into sin so Solomon looks out on this generation and he says two things about their worship as it's revealed in their words words words words he says firstly it's way too casual and secondly it's way too cheap they're complacent in their worship but what does Solomon want to replace what does he want to replace that complacency right see this word at verse 7 what does he want there to be in the hearts of God's people verse 7 it's the word fear do you see it fear this word this word that describes the disposition of the hearts of all those who understand and who have responded rightly to who the

Lord is now this word fear it's kind of like a Russian doll kind of word right there's lots of words inside it which kind of capture what it means words like awe okay just standing in awe of who God is you think of Isaiah 6 what Isaiah did is he came before the Lord he wasn't aware of his smallness he was aware of his sinfulness and like a holy God awe and reverence and devotion and adoration we just love the Lord for who he is and dedication we want to follow his statutes and his ways and obedience awe humility reverence devotion adoration dedication and obedience I love how C.S. Lewis have you ever read C.S. Lewis some of his Narnia stuff he's got a wonderful way of capturing truths have you ever read how Aslan's described there you see it says it is it Lucy and Mr.

Tumnus who are describing Aslan what do they say to describe Aslan safe who said anything about safe but he is good to fear the Lord is to know who he is and to respond rightly to who he is that is the heart of the true worshipper filled with fear of the Lord so Solomon says to this generation make your words for you make your words for you and of course friends right at the heart of the Christian faith is the true king who made his words for you what I do is every year I try and have a take a new bible I make that my bible for the year read it in my own quiet times take it with me on visits just got God's word fresh every year right so this year I've got one of these red letter bibles

[22:12] I don't know if you've ever had one of these red letter bibles can't seem the biggest fan because the whole thing should be in red but you get the picture right the words of Jesus are in red so what happens is I was reading recently reading Mark 15 if you've got a red letter bible you can turn it up if not you can check it out in your time later Mark 15 and all the way up until Mark 15 friends there is red letters all over in other words Jesus is speaking a lot right and then you get to Mark 15 and the red just stops it just stops okay you get Mark 15 Jesus speaks as he responds to Pilate Pilate asks him are you the king of the Jews Jesus says three words you said so and then you read of Jesus trial you read of his mocking you read of his walk to the cross you read of his crucifixion and the next words you get in red are those words that Jesus cries out from the cross my God my God quoting

Psalms 22 why have you forsaken me right in other words Mark 15 is a chapter where Jesus says virtually nothing why can't God his tongue nervous what's going on stage fright no it's Mark's way of showing his readers that Jesus remember who he is the one who was receiving all praise in heaven left it to come to earth in our flesh it's Mark's way of saying that he was completely submitted completely focused on carrying out his father's will of reconciling lost and sinful men and women to himself how was he going to do it he was going to do it through his death on cross what a word his blood speaks to all those who would trust him for the forgiveness of sins what a word over our lives his blood speaks because our sin had spoken words over us like guilty deserving of wrath and condemned and

Jesus his blood speaks words over our lives of forgiveness and of grace and of righteousness and of life the king who made his words few and yet what a word friends if we want to know thinking about what to do with the fear of the Lord if you want to know what that looks like fully perfectly in a life of a human being we look no further than to the life of Jesus if you want to see what a life of fear of the Lord what a life of sacrificial obedience of love for the Father looks like look no further than the Saviour the king who made his words few the king who demonstrated fear of the Lord and therefore it's unsurprising that as we read about the early church in the book of Acts this spirit filled community that Luke tells us that the fear of the Lord was central to their existence as a community right this is what Luke writes in Acts 9 they're on the screen so you can look there and look it out in your own time later

Luke writes this in Acts 9 after a time of hostile persecution where the church are scattered scattered everywhere Luke writes this it's his little status report in the book of Acts then the church throughout Judea Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened and then we get this living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit it increased in numbers to see how this posture of awe and of humility and of reverence and devotion and adoration and dedication and obedience it characterized was central to the life of these early Christian believers believers they must be careful must be careful at romanticizing the early church right you just need to read a few chapters earlier and you see how wrongly these people got it right it's not romanticized this but there are big lessons for us here about here is a community with a big view of who

God is and a big expectancy of what the Lord will do by his spirit this fear of the Lord was fundamental to their very existence as a community and friends as we bring it to a close today the challenge for us as a community here is to ask ourselves individually but to ask ourselves corporately whether the fear of the Lord is central to our life as a community right think about I'd love us to be the kind of church and I pray increasingly that we are increasingly that as people come into contact with us that they understand and they see that they're coming into an orbit that says these guys are something different and you know what we are singing off different hymn sheets because we are characterized as a community by the fear of the Lord so let's bring it home here's two generations of God's people we've looked at right Ecclesiastes 5

[27 : 42] Solomon's generation and Acts the early church let me ask you which mindset reminds you of us and I'm prepping myself for a couple weeks time where in an evening our doorbell will go all the time knock knock knock knock doorbell and it'll be children at the door and it'll utter us that question that we always get at this time of year right three words trick or treat trick or treat now normally just don't say that anymore they're just going to hand you a bucket right give me some trick or treat see just as a way of lodging the challenge of this passage in our minds and as we think about application in our own lives this week let me just ask us Ecclesiastes 5 the challenge here friends it's it's fear or fool fear or fool as we come to worship as we come to think about our whole lives and how we understand the

God that we're dealing with here as he's revealed himself perfectly in the person of his son friends as we think about him the challenge is fear or fool fear or fool who has held the oceans in his hands who has numbered every grain of sand kings and nations tremble at his voice all creation rises to rejoice who has felt the nails upon his hands bearing all the guilt of sinful man God eternal humbled to the grave Jesus savior risen now to reign behold our God seated on his throne come let us adore him behold our king nothing can compare come let us adore him friends let me just we're going to pray in a second but let me just have a minute of silence and let's just make our words few as we respond to ecclesiastes five and so father in the silence we bring to you our own prayers and confessions and father I pray that you would help us to fix our eyes on your son

Jesus the one whose blood speaks a better word and I pray father that you would help us lord all to have a big view of who you are would you blow our minds lord as we come to comprehend even a bit more of something of your greatness lord we realize that we are hopelessly lost in ourselves and we pray father that through your word that you would raise our eyes by your spirit to your greatness and we pray this through the precious blood and the name of Jesus amen