



Practice Guide | *Simplicity & Generosity*

WEEK 3—Simplicity of Speech

Meeting Prep

1. Listen to this sermon: [“Simplicity of Speech”](#) (42:20)

Read this Overview

Last week’s subject was simplicity of heart, the inward simplicity that is the foundation of all our outward simplicity. Since, as Jesus said, “out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks” (Mt. 12:34), that’s the next place to turn our attention: our mouths and our words. Speech is the bridge between our inner and outer worlds. Simplicity of speech is a disciplined attempt to talk like Jesus talked—and *not* to talk like Jesus *didn’t* talk. In both our words and our silence we are to become more like him, giving evidence of a heart that is more and more like his.

Begin with Prayer & Silence

Pray together: *May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.* (Psalm 19:14)

Keep silence together before God for a few minutes. Listen for him speaking to you. Also, stay aware of how you feel about the silence: uncomfortable? anxious? peaceful? tired? Acknowledge those emotions to God, and ask him to reveal what they’re pointing to.

Close the silence with a brief prayer, inviting the Holy Spirit to guide your time together.

Discuss the Teaching

To begin: Have 1-2 people share a story of a time when someone else’s simplicity of speech—either what they said or what they *didn’t* say—blessed or impacted them.

1. What stood out to you from the video teaching?
2. Starting at 27:19, the video describes simplicity of speech as, partially, “curating our conversation in such a way that we manifest Jesus’ heart in our speech.” It takes examples straight out of the New Testament:
 - Tell the truth; don’t lie.
 - Ask for what we want; don’t manipulate, dominate, or condemn.
 - Build up people; don’t tear them down.
 - Bless; don’t curse.
 - Prophecy (speak truth over or into a person’s life).

Which of these (or other Scriptures) have been done for/to you? Which have you practiced toward others? Which seem especially hard to practice?

3. In what circumstances are you most likely either to “run off at the mouth” or to “clam up” and be silent in an unhealthy way? What do you think is driving those responses?
4. When we fail at simplicity of speech (whether speaking or silent), our response can often be to beat ourselves up or to shrug it off like no big deal. Which of those responses do you tend toward? Why do you think that’s your tendency?
5. In *Abundant Simplicity*, Jan Johnson talks about how practicing simplicity of speech pointed out two bad habits: trying to convince others of her own position or ideas; and trying to maintain some image (of being smart, witty, caring, etc.)⁷ How do these habits show up in your own speech and life? What other habits or impulses can you identify beneath the way you use your words?
6. To what person or group of people could you impart grace this week through your words or your silence? To whom would you like to show hospitality by making room for them with your silence or your speech?

Individual & Group Practice: Strategic Silence

Jan Johnson calls simplicity of speech the “fewness and fullness of words.” Though most of us need to learn to talk less, silence itself isn’t the goal. Instead, like Jesus, we want our words to bring about the life of God’s kingdom, whether we speak or we don’t speak. Our words should be fewer, but they should also be fuller.

We don’t need to take vows of total silence to grow in this (though that might be helpful for a limited time!). Instead, we can practice *strategic silence*, the commitment not to speak in particular circumstances for a defined period.⁸ For example, if you struggle with giving unsolicited advice and opinions, you might commit not to share your opinion about anything unless asked. If you’re compelled to have the last word in conversations, you might commit not to having it, to giving others the gift of having the last word. (“Goodbye” is fine, of course). If you deal with the need to “be right,” you might commit not to correct others when they say something wrong.

Remember, this is a difficult practice! Your words aren’t just words, but the fruit of what’s actually in your heart, which can be very persistent. So have grace toward yourself, even as you’re seeking to have grace toward others. Experiment with this just a week (or even a day) at a time. Ask a friend to pray for you to be filled with the Holy Spirit, both to keep your commitment and to find grace when you don’t.

[Optional Family Practice: “A Listening Walk”]

On a day when the weather permits it, take a 5-10 minute (or more!) walk outside together as a family. If your neighborhood isn’t good for that, find a nearby park. Don’t take cell phones, toys, or other distractions. On this walk, your goal is *to be silent and listen*. All of you will keep your ears open for sounds that are always there, but which you often miss in a noisy (and speech-filled) life.

Before you begin, commit to being completely silent together, with no talking or extra noise like music. As you walk in silence, notice whatever sounds are there. They could be quiet sounds from

⁷ Jan Johnson, *Abundant Simplicity*, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2011, pp. 62-64.

⁸ Jan Johnson, *Abundant Simplicity*, pp. 66-68.

inside your own body: your heartbeat; your breathing; a rumbling stomach. They could be sounds of nature: the wind in the trees; birds chirping; water trickling; distant thunder. They could be sounds that remind you of your circumstances or season in life: a squeaky stroller wheel; a dog's paws on pavement. They could be sounds that put you in touch with your community: cars driving by; neighbors mowing their lawns; children playing.

Afterward, talk together about what you heard. What surprised you? What did the sounds make you think or feel? What do you wish you could hear more or less of? How did being quiet help you become more aware of God's presence with you and love for you? If it seems appropriate, talk as a family about ways that you could practice silence to listen for God's voice.

Close with Prayer

*Lord, empty me of all words
that are not full of you.*

*Grant me a silence
where I can hear your voice,
and where others can hear you through me,
not just in spite of me.*

*Teach my mouth to be still,
so that you can tend the garden of my heart
and make its soil fit
to bear the fruit of your kingdom.*

In Jesus' name. Amen.