

Speak the gospel to others

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[0 : 00] Let's pray. Father, I pray that this entire series on gospel centrality will have its desired impact and will help us move towards becoming a church that is truly more and more gospel-centered.

And I pray once again this morning that the words that come from this pulpit are the words that truly come from you and are not just my own musings.

We pray that we will hear your voice and not harden our hearts. Please take these words and use it to impact us and help us to relate to each other as you wish us to.

In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen. Well, as I've just said this morning, we come to the final sermon exploring what gospel centrality is all about.

And during coffee, please do come and have a conversation with me about what you've learned. Or what you're still puzzled about. I would love to have a chat with you. Make full use of the webpage as well to ask questions if you prefer that mode of communication.

[1 : 11] And I think I haven't acknowledged it before. But I also just want to say thank you to our deacon for evangelism, Greg Gomang. I think he's away today. But he's the one who encouraged me to think about doing a sermon series on this very topic last year.

So if you're watching online, thanks, Greg. But let me just recap one last time what we've covered so far. So far we've majored mainly on this question, what is gospel centrality?

We've seen that it means to live from the gospel. The gospel, rather than rules or experiences, is the engine of our Christian life.

Because Christ has died and risen again, and the Holy Spirit so unites us to him that Christ's righteousness is really our own, and we now share Christ's holiness with him, so we have a new identity.

And so we live daily out of that new identity as new creations in Christ. As Tim Keller says, in our Christian life, we never get beyond the gospel to something more advanced.

[2 : 27] The gospel is not the minimum required doctrine necessary to enter the kingdom, but the way we all make progress in the kingdom. Then we said it also means to live for the gospel.

Because the gospel is life-transforming, earth-shaking news, news that determines the eternal destiny of a person, we make it our highest priority.

Following in the footsteps of Paul, we view every circumstance, good and bad, as an opportunity to bear witness to Jesus, because we value him above all else.

We want to help non-Christians know Jesus, and our fellow Christians know Jesus better. And we are willing to make sacrifices if that means Jesus is made known and magnified to someone.

And to be gospel-centered also means to live through the gospel. It's to look at every area of our lives and let the gospel shape it in such a way that Jesus is seen to be Lord in that area.

[3 : 39] And so we try our best to be intentional so that our approach to suffering, to sexuality, to self-image, to society, and absolutely everything is being influenced by the gospel.

That's the what of gospel-centrality. But how can we be gospel-centered? Well, last week, we began to see that if we want to grow in gospel-centrality, then we must be driven by God's word. The Bible is how God speaks to us, and we discover His favorite subject is Jesus. That's who the Bible is about from beginning to end.

That's why our second core conviction exists, because it promotes the first core conviction. And today, I want to keep building on the how.

How can we become gospel-centered, and how can we remain gospel-centered? Well, here's our answer in a nutshell. To become and remain gospel-centered, we must become a community of truth and love that is focused on growing disciples.

[4 : 56] That's basically the third and the fourth of our four core convictions, which you can find at the top of the second page of our bulletin. So to unpack that, what I want to do today is to focus initially on two key texts, Hebrews 3, verse 12 to 13, and Ephesians 4, verse 15 to 16.

From these two passages, I want us to see the danger we face and the remedy we need. And after we've done that, then I'll try to get more practical about how we can put into practice the words of those two key texts.

And I suggest there is a language we need to become fluent in. So that's where we're going. So firstly, the danger we face.

Come with me, first of all, to Hebrews 3, verse 12. The writer, you can see, is addressing his brothers and sisters in Christ. And you would notice it starts with a warning.

See to it, verse 12 begins. Actually, that language could be translated in an even stronger way.

Take care. Watch out. That's the kind of tone being expressed here.

[6 : 16] But what is he asking us to watch out for? What is he warning against? Verse 12 tells us again. See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart.

Why does he feel the need to sound this warning? Well, because the writer knows his history. Right before verse 12, the writer directs our attention to Psalm 95.

Now, Psalm 95 looks back at the generation of Israelites after the exodus from Egypt. Imagine yourselves in their shoes.

You have just seen the most amazing signs and wonders as God sent plague after plague on your oppressors. You've seen him part the Red Sea to ensure your miraculous escape.

You've tasted firsthand the provision of God as he gave you manna in the dry and arid desert. God has clearly and visibly demonstrated his commitment to you.

[7 : 29] And he's given you instructions on Mount Sinai in the form of the Ten Commandments so we know how to demonstrate our commitment back. So in light of God's clear and visible care for you, what do you think you will do next?

Well, the Old Testament tells us what this generation did. They complained. They wailed and grumbled. And this was a pattern that continued all the way from the middle of Exodus to Numbers 14.

And Numbers 14 proved to be the last straw when they failed to trust God, not for the first time, and refused to enter the promised land that God had prepared for them.

Astonishingly, they preferred the oppressive slavery of Egypt to the amazing rest God had prepared for them. They simply refused to believe God would lead them in despite all the promises.

They hardened their hearts. And so, Hebrews 3, verses 10 to 11, God was angry. And he declared, They shall never enter my rest.

[8 : 50] If that's what you want, that's what you get. So here's the warning. See to it you don't make the exact same mistake.

See to it that none of you has the same unbelieving hearts, the same hearts that refuse to trust God's word. Because that's the danger every generation faces right up to today.

Hearts that harden into unbelief. You see, we too have experienced God's rescue and care from the power of sin. And we are also being led to the promised land of the new creation.

That's where God is leading us. That's what he promises. But there is a danger we face. The deceitfulness of sin. For sin is still around.

And the end of verse 13 tells us what sin is like. It's destructive. You know, if sin came to us showing its true colors, we would reject it straight away because we can see its ugliness, its destructiveness, its viciousness.

[10 : 08] But sin knows that, so it never turns up without a disguise. It comes armed with promises filled with appetizing sweetness.

If it shows up in the form of adultery, for example, it will whisper to you, Hey, go ahead. Isn't it nice to be appreciated and valued in a way that you have never been before by that other person?

They're so much better than your spouse. And it tells us a million other lies. Sin draws our attention to the pleasures distracting us from how the story always ends with bitterness and groaning, as Proverbs 5 verse 11 says.

That's how sin works. And when we consistently give into it, our hearts grow harder and harder. Again, the end of Hebrews 3 verse 13 tells us that.

So come back to the example of adultery. As someone gets deeper and deeper into an adulterous relationship, he or she might begin to calm their conscience by saying, Hey, but God wants me to be happy, right?

[11 : 35] And if confronted with the word of God, the person might say, Well, there are many interpretations of the Bible, so that's just what your interpretation says. And before you know it, he says, Ah, you know what?

Actually, I guess I never really believed that gospel stuff anyway. Can you see the slippery slope? We give in to the lies, sin tells us, which leads to our hearts progressively becoming hardened, which leads tragically to unbelief, which leads us away from the God of eternal rest.

So that's the danger we face. Hearts that can be deceived by sin, hearts that harden into unbelief. So what's the remedy?

Well, we come now to the second part of our sermon today, the remedy we need. If verse 12 gives us the warning, then verse 13 gives us the remedy.

So what is it? Is it to have more quiet times? Is it simply to pray longer? Is it to go on an annual silent spiritual retreat by yourself?

[12 : 52] Maybe up on Gunong Murud? What does verse 13 say? But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

Did you catch that? We are protected from the deceitfulness of sin and kept from the path of an unbelieving heart, not just by practicing spiritual disciplines on our own, but through the faith-building encouragement of our fellow Christians.

As John Piper puts it, you and I are the instruments by which God preserves the faith of his children. Perseverance is a community project.

Just like God is not going to evangelize the world without human faith-awakening voices, neither is he going to preserve his church without human faith-sustaining voices.

And clearly from the words, encourage one another, in verse 13, it means all of us, not just preachers, we depend on each other to endure in faith to the end.

[14 : 22] And notice how often we need this encouragement. Occasional encouragement is not enough. Instead, it is needed daily.

It is needed today. Notice how the writer highlights that word in verse 13. As long as it is called today, encouragement is needed.

Because today, there is still opportunity to trust what God says in his word. As long as it is not yet the day when Jesus returns, every day is a new today where we can respond with obedience and not harden our hearts.

And so, today is the day we can still encourage our fellow Christians and be encouraged by them to hang on to Jesus. Can you see what kind of picture Hebrews 3 verse 13 is painting for us?

It's painting for us a picture where Christian community is a must, not an option. A gospel-centered community is not a convenience you can fit in when you wish to, but a commitment you must make if you wish to make it to the finishing line as a Christian.

[15 : 46] How can we keep going as a Christian when we are in a place where other Christians keep encouraging us to listen to the Lord Jesus?

How do we end up abandoning the race when we put ourselves in a position of isolation with no one around us to show mutual concern and give mutual admonition?

But what exactly does it mean to encourage one another? What is the character of that encouragement? Well, from the context, clearly it means speaking motivating words to help each other not drift away from Jesus towards destruction.

Or perhaps another way to put it is to go to our other key verse for today, Ephesians 4 verse 15. Let me read it again.

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

[17 : 04] To encourage one another, therefore, is to speak the truth in love. But again, what does that mean? Is speaking the truth in love that moment when you tell your friend, I, uh, sorry friend, I hate to tell you this, but, you know that shirt you're wearing, honestly speaking, it's ugly.

I'm just speaking the truth to you in love. No. Notice in verse 15 what the aim of this speaking is. The aim of these words is to help somebody to grow spiritually. It's to help them become more mature in Christ.

If you like, it's the other side of the coin of Hebrews 3 verse 13. If Hebrews 3 verse 13 says to encourage is to keep people from drifting, then Ephesians 4 verse 15 says to encourage is to help people grow.

It's two sides of the same coin. And so these encouragements will be words specifically focused on growing one another as disciples.

[18 : 25] And in Ephesians, the other two times the word truth is mentioned, it is always associated specifically with Jesus.

Let me show you. Look back at Ephesians 1 verse 13 for instance on the screen. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. So notice what is the truth here referring to? It's the gospel. It's the truth of Jesus. Or take Ephesians 4 verse 20 to 21.

That, however, is not the way of life you learn when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.

So do you see how specifically we are to encourage one another? Quite simply, it is the title of our sermon today.

[19 : 25] We speak the gospel to each other. We don't let each other forget that Jesus is Saviour and Lord.

Perhaps when you saw the sermon title this morning, you thought that this was going to be a sermon on evangelism. Well, yes it is. But it is a sermon on evangelising Christians, not non-Christians.

Because Christians still need the gospel too. Remember, it is the engine of the Christian life. We need to help each other work out how to live from the gospel, for the gospel, and through the gospel.

Because we love one another. We want what is best for the other person. So we speak in love. We speak up because we don't want the other Christian to stay immature, or worse still, to walk away from Jesus.

And as we do so, Ephesians 4, verse 16, from him, the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work.

[20 : 45] That's why we have our third and fourth core convictions. things. But now we run into a practical problem. It's hard to know exactly how to do this, isn't it?

It's like learning another language as an adult. Have you ever tried that? Some of you are like me, a banana, and you know it's not easy when you're trying to learn Mandarin or whatever it is when you're past 21.

Often you sound childish, you don't always make sense to others. The worst part is when you get the tones wrong and the Mandarin words you say end up taking a different meaning to what you intended.

You're not fluent. And that's where I think most of us are when it comes to speaking the gospel to one another. We do understand on an intellectual level what the gospel is.

Good news about Christ coming into the world to save sinners. But the challenge is that we don't know how to encourage one another with the gospel.

[21 : 56] As we enter coffee time after the service, we don't know how to put into practice Hebrews 3 verse 13 and Ephesians 4 verse 15. We are like me, speaking Mandarin.

Uncertain, stammering, struggling to find the right words. And because we're not fluent in the gospel, we don't encourage one another with the gospel.

After all, we don't want to sound awkward and stupid. So this brings us to the third part of our sermon this morning, the language we need to become fluent in.

And this is where I try to get a little more practical about how exactly we can encourage one another. And from the beginning, we must recognize something fundamental.

You see, how does anyone become more fluent in a language? Answer, we simply have to keep speaking. We have to practice.

[23 : 00] We have to be not afraid to make mistakes, to sound silly, sometimes to risk a misunderstanding here and there. If we don't choose to speak, we will never become fluent.

And we have to be patient. You probably won't get from kindergarten level to becoming a fluent Mandarin speaker in just one month. You need to get a sense of the vocabulary and the grammar.

And it helps, of course, if you have someone more experienced walking alongside you to help you master the language. language, it helps if you have peers with you who are also wanting to become fluent in the language.

So it is with becoming fluent in the gospel. We need, first of all, the content and the vocabulary. We need to learn more and more who Jesus is.

We need to learn how the gospel speaks today to our anxiety, to our anger, to our shame. We need to grow in understanding about what God says about money, about relationships, and how the gospel impacts all those things.

[24 : 13] And then we need to keep practicing using these words we learn in conversation, in a way that builds up the other person, and we are more motivated when we do it together.

So quite simply, in order to become fluent, we must just get on with just trying to speak it, even if we sound babyish at the beginning.

But once we recognize those fundamental truths about gaining fluency in a language, what else can we practically do? Well, number one, we need to learn to speak the truth in love to our own hearts first.

You see, you talk about what you love. Everyone does. First-time parents do it, sports fans do it, and if Jesus has captured your heart, and you love him, you naturally want to know more about him, more and more.

And if you are encouraged by the word about Jesus, the word of Jesus, the word from Jesus, you can more easily communicate that same encouragement to others.

[25 : 31] But if we are not personally experiencing the encouragement of the gospel, it's going to be very hard then to encourage others with the gospel.

So the first thing we need to learn is to speak the truth in love to our own hearts first. We need to hear from God that he loves and accepts us even when we stumble.

We need to hear from God that he remains faithful even when we are faithless. We need to hear from God that he sets us free from the power of sin and given us what we need to live an altogether different life.

We need to meditate on words like those we find, for instance, in Isaiah 1, verse 18. Come now, let us settle the matter, says the Lord. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.

Though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. Or Zephaniah 3, verse 17. Or Colossians 3, verse 1 to 2, which we heard a few weeks ago.

[26 : 49] Since then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

So let's open our Bibles and make the effort to go and meet Jesus in his word. For when we are encouraged by him, we will have more hope, more confidence, more desire, that others will receive the same encouragement as well.

And we want to encourage them with those truths that have so encouraged us. Then number two, we need to be willing to move towards one another.

Sounds obvious, doesn't it? But isn't it true that there are so many things that stop us from engaging with others in a meaningful way?

Perhaps we're tired. It's been a long week, so the last thing we want to do is to speak to others. Perhaps we are intimidated.

[27 : 58] We're not sure we've got anything to say or how to say things. Perhaps we're distracted. We are preoccupied by something else. Perhaps we're apprehensive that the other person will not be receptive because that has happened in the past with others.

And now you're worried about their reaction. Moving towards others is hard. Absolutely. Anything worth doing is often not easy.

But remember the gospel? The gospel says, as we saw last week, that God took the initiative to speak to us and establish a relationship with us.

And so because our Lord moved towards people, we too move towards people. We move even towards those who are not always receptive to us.

After all, we weren't exactly receptive to God either, were we? But as a gospel-centered people, why not live for the gospel, take a risk, and move towards others?

[29 : 15] And then number three, listen and look for opportunities to speak gospel truths. moving towards someone else simply starts by saying, hi, how are you doing today?

And then paying attention to the other person. It's to make space for the other person to share with you something on their hearts if they wish to do so. Now, that sounds simple, but if you think about it, it is surprisingly rare in a conversation to experience people being truly interested in what you have to say.

And when people sense that, they appreciate it. I know that this is something I want to do better in myself. And if the conversation simply becomes a conversation about the football or something else, well, that's okay.

It's all right. Not every conversation needs to be a profound one. But why not try to make space for someone to share with you honestly?

Ask them how they are really doing. Occasionally, over coffee after service, I have had someone share with me about a worry they have about their kids or anxiety over the state of their finances or something like that.

[30 : 40] And when that happens, then often I have to pray, God, what will you have me say now? What is the best thing I can say that is truly a gospel encouragement that comes from your word, that will help the person grow as a Christian?

And so if a person is worried, for example, about something, then I could try to explore with them what is underneath their worries. Is the worry perhaps driven by a fear that maybe God is not really good, that he doesn't have my best interest at heart?

Well, if so, then perhaps I could point to the person, to a relevant scripture passage or story.

Perhaps Jesus is the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep.

Or perhaps something more brief, like 1 Peter 5 or 7, with its direct assertion that we can cast all our anxieties on him because he cares for us.

That is an explicit gospel promise. Or perhaps if the worry is driven not so much by a fear that God isn't good, but by a sense that everything just feels out of control at the moment, then perhaps we can help someone remember the way in which God orchestrated every single event to ensure that Jesus will go to the cross for our sake.

[32 : 11] And if he did that, we can be sure that he is in control of your situation as well, for your good. Well, that is how we speak gospel truth to others, and hopefully how others speak gospel truth back to us.

But of course, that means encouragement takes time. As we have said earlier, becoming fluent in the language doesn't happen overnight.

It takes time to become skillful at speaking gospel truths. And of course, it takes time to build relationships with others so that they might be willing to share their inner life with you.

It takes time to create an environment where meaningful interactions can take place. But we will make de-invest investment if we are convinced that speaking the truth in love is how God protects and murches us.

But before we finish, let me just tackle one more issue. What about when we have to speak to others about their sin? After all, Hebrews 3 verse 13 seems to assume encouraging one another will sometimes involve that.

[33 : 34] We encourage others so that they won't be hardened by sin's deceitfulness, which suggests that sometimes they are being deceived by sin right in that moment.

So how can we do that well? Well, again, we need to speak the truth in love to ourselves first. We need to say to ourselves, when I speak to someone, I'm speaking to them as a fellow sinner.

The gospel reminds me that I too am someone who needs God's grace every day. I am not holier than thou, than them. And that will help us should someone react to us in a defensive manner.

We can already acknowledge we are fellow sinners without allowing that to become an excuse that the other person can hide behind. Then remember what is the goal of such a conversation.

When we need to speak to others about their sin, we do so with the aim of not wanting their hearts to be hardened. We do so because we want them to become mature in Christ.

[34 : 42] That is always the aim. It is out of love rather than hurt or anger or vengeance or something like that. So make sure that is our purpose.

And then we try to seek the good in the other person where we can. Is there something you can affirm about the other person and expect you know is pleasing to God? Then mention that.

And then what else can we do? One helpful principle is to act as a mirror. What does that mean? Well, remember sin is deceitful.

It's lying to us. It's showing us a distorted view of reality. If I am sinfully angry, for example, I might not even realise it in that moment.

I am deceived about my current state. I justify myself. But if my wife comes to me and says, you know, when you're angry like that, you say hurtful words, you scare the kids into silence, and you are not reflecting God the Father, well, she is holding up a mirror to what I really am like in that moment.

[35 : 54] And hopefully that will bring me to repentance. But even more importantly, we hold up the mirror of the word. I should have included that in the sermon outline.

We seek to show from scripture where the person is going wayward. Let scripture be the mirror that accurately names their reality.

And hopefully that will snap them back to repent, to say sorry to God. And the other thing to remember is that we cannot control the reactions of others.

If we have to confront others about their sin, we hope they will repent, of course. But there is no guarantee. Now, sometimes all a person needs is time.

He needs time to process. He'll get there. He just needs a bit of time. Other times, very sadly, perhaps a person's heart is already being hardened, in which case we need to keep praying for them.

[36 : 58] Now, if you want to think a little more deeply about how we can speak more fruitfully to others about their sin, then you might want to look up this book on the screen, side by side by Ed Welch.

It's in our church library. And you can look at chapter 15 and 16 in particular. The chapter headings are Prepare to Talk About Sin and Help Fellow Sinners. So you can find even more help there. In fact, the whole book is worth reading. But here's the point. This is something we cannot avoid. It's tough. But God says if we love others, we need to do this from time to time.

And so I hope that we will all take the risks and the effort to become more deliberate about encouraging one another. That we will be readier to speak the truth in love to one another.

Remember, it's how we keep our hearts soft. It's how we mature in Christ. It will be awkward, sure. It will be weird at times, sure.

[38 : 01] But that's how it always is when we are learning to become fluent in a language. And think about the payoff. gospel fluency resulting in everyone finishing the race.

Wouldn't that be amazing if we all reach that point? And as we finish today's sermon, we are also finishing this sermon series on gospel centrality.

But my brothers and sisters, I don't want us to file this sermon series away and forget all about it by next week. Instead, I want to encourage now all of us to start thinking intentionally.

How can I live from the gospel? How can I live for the gospel? How can I live through the gospel? How can I be driven by God's word? How can I encourage one person in my life this week with the gospel?

For if we agree with the gospel in our heads, but we don't live out the gospel in our lives, the Bible has a word for that. Hypocrisy. And I'm sure none of us want to be hypocritical Christians.

[39 : 12] So let's start today by speaking the truth in love to our very own hearts. Keep asking God to help us be gospel centered. And if you're serious about that, he might surprise you in the way he answers your prayer.

Let's pray now. Father, I pray once again that as we come to the end of this series, I pray that every word that has been spoken will be one that you would use to shape us and transform us and help us to be more gospel centered, to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, the author and pioneer of our faith, so that we might run the race, so that we might not drift away.

And I pray especially that we would become a community where we would help each other to persevere, that we would be ready to encourage one another not to be hardened by sin's deceitfulness, but to grow up towards maturity, to become Christ-like in every way.

So that is my prayer today. May you answer that prayer. In Jesus' name we ask this. Amen.