

# LORD

Our fall discipleship series focuses on the Ten Commandments. Not only what they teach us not to do, but what to do. Jesus is Savior and Lord. Once we know Him as Savior, it's time to begin to allow His lordship in every corner of our lives. I can easily recognize Jesus as "Lord" in some abstract way. He's Lord of the universe. He's Lord of all history. But it gets harder when I think about His lordship in my own life. Is He really my master when I'm thinking about my relationships with my family? Is Jesus my first consult and guide when I'm arranging my finances? So much of discipleship is simply about loving Jesus more—more than desires of the flesh, more than money, more than what my neighbor has. The Ten Commandments are a great measure of our hearts. Do we love Jesus more than these? Jesus is Lord.

## LORD • EXODUS 20:16; EPHESIANS 4:25, 29–32 • Katie Fowler • October 21, 2018

How do you use *your* words? To build others up? To tear others down? To bless? To curse? Most of us said our first word sometime between the ages of one and two years old. From there, bit by bit, we learned how to put sounds together, syllables together, sentences together. Slowly grasping the power of communication—to express how you felt, to get what you want, when to use your inside voice or your outside voice. What words will automatically land you in time out. All good life lessons.

And as you were learning to form your words, perhaps you struggled to speak. To articulate what you wanted or needed, and at some point some adult around you, said this phrase, this well-worn phrase that adults just love to say to kids; they said: “Use your words.” Use your words, Johnny. Use your words. Maybe you have used that phrase before as you struggled to communicate with a screaming three-year-old or a completely melting down five-year-old. Use your words.

Well, you and I have gotten just fine at using our words, haven’t we? Quite proficient, really. Think about how many words come out of your mouth in a single day—in deep conversation, or moments of small talk, a passing remark, or by text message, in a quick email, on a social media post. Maybe words spoken under your breath. How do you use *your* words? To build people up? To cut them down? To make yourself look good? Or to benefit others? To curse or to bless? How have you used your words today? This week? During my freshman year in college, one night a dear friend approached me and said, “You are so sarcastic, Katie. And it’s really hurtful to me.”

I remember looking up the definition of sarcasm one time. I still have it memorized. A biting or caustic remark with the intention to hurt or wound. My friend said to me, in that moment, “you are using your words to hurt me.” Ouch, right? How do you use your words? Because we say words are cheap, but are they really? It seems to me that words are weighty; they really can be rather costly. Some of my biggest regrets are over words that I have spoken in anger. Some of the things that have had the biggest impact on who I am are words that have been spoken to me—for good and for ill.

Proverbs 18:21, “The tongue has the power of life and death.” Whoa. We better pay attention to how we use our words. As we draw near to the end of our **Lord** series, we explore this morning our speech. Jesus is **Lord of My Voice**. Jesus is Lord over the very words coming out of my mouth. And here is what we find as we study God’s word today: I can speak the truth because truth has been spoken over me. I can use my words for good because goodness has been spoken over me.

Today, we will look at Ephesians 4 together. Here Paul is painting this picture, this contrast between the old life and the new. There is an old way, a life lived apart from God, a life not taking God into account. And that disregard for God showed up in the very words coming out of our mouths. Words are used to control, to dominate, to maintain the upper hand. Lying. Gossip. Slander.

Sarcasm. Bitter speech. Angry words. Psalm 12:3–4 says, “May the Lord silence all flattering lips and every boastful tongue—those who say, ‘By our tongues we will prevail; our own lips will defend us—who is lord over us?’”

By our tongues we will prevail—who needs God? Truthfulness is forsaken. And words are used like weapons. Used to cut down, to destroy those around us. Today, we see it in politics; we have come to this place where we don’t even really expect politicians to tell the truth anymore. Lying is the norm. Hateful, vindictive speech takes over the public square. And in public discourse, how easy, how tempting it is to vilify the other side—they’re now the enemy.

We see it everyday. Words are used to belittle someone. My sister once worked in a customer service call center. You wouldn’t believe the things that were said to her. People taking out their anger, their rage on her. Questioning her education level. Calling her names. And then there’s social media. Let’s talk about the internet. With one little click, there your words are—posted for all to see. Content passed along, memes shared, often without a thought of—is this actually true? After all, little known fact, it was George Washington who actually first said: “Don’t believe everything you read on the internet.” Or did Jesus say it first?

How do you use your words? Let’s take a closer look at the ninth commandment. “You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.” Your words have power. Yours words can bring life or death. And God, the Living God, commands us, “don’t lie.” As I have prepared this sermon, I have been wrestling with this question, why? Why do we lie? So I Googled it. I came across an article from National Geographic entitled: Why we lie: the science behind our deceptive ways. According to that article, there are two big, overarching reasons we lie: to promote yourself and to protect yourself.

First, to protect yourself. When we are little and have done something wrong, there comes this moment of truth, we are busted, the jig is up—a cover-up scheme is needed; so we lie. No, no, I did not eat the last cookie. I did not spit on my sister, mother. I am outraged, really, by your allegation. And that continues throughout our lives. When I am threatened or feel under attack and need to protect myself, I lie.

But we also lie to promote ourselves: Have you heard about my recent fishing trip? The fish was thiiiiis big, right? Your resume is *mostly true* with just a few factual errors in it. The business report was *mostly true*. And really, whether it is gossip or sarcasm, hateful speech or lies, I think, at its core, when we use our words falsely, when we use our words harmfully, we are trying to protect ourselves or promote ourselves. We feel threatened, and so with our words, we come out swinging. We feel less than, so we cut other down. We are afraid, and so we weaponize our words. We want to project an image, so we twist our words. We want to feel better about ourselves, and we so tear someone else down.

I had a fight with my husband, Chuck, a few weeks ago. I said something sharp and stinging. I am sure none of you can relate to that at all, right? I felt in that moment, after I said those words, the amazing grace of the Lord in just shut-



ting my mouth. Sometimes God is so kind in just whispering to us, "Stop talking. Stop talking now." As I reflected on what I had said to Chuck, I knew it had more to do with me—my insecurities, my frustration, my brokenness.

You know, Scripture is pretty clear; Jesus is pretty clear: what's inside of you is going to come out of you. What's bumping around in your heart is going to show up in your actions—in things like how you talk to people.

I want us to take a moment and examine how we use our words—and what is kicking around in our hearts in those moments. In her book, the *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, Adele Calhoun raises these questions:

1. How do you feel about, and respond, to conversations where others dominate or outshine you?
2. In conversations, when do you feel the need to appear well-informed, spiritual or witty?
3. When and how are you most likely to speak a harsh or impatient word?
4. How do you speak about others when they are not around?

James, the brother of Jesus, was not exactly a beat around the bush kind of guy. He writes, "All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be" (James 3:7-10).

This should not be. And here is the good news, as Paul shows us in Ephesians 4, we are being invited into a different way of life. In Christ, through the Holy Spirit, a new way is opened up to us. God, who brought the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. God has, through Jesus Christ, brought us out of the slavery of sin and death. There is an old way, yes. But a new way of life has been opened up through Jesus Christ. Through Jesus who died for us and was raised to life. I am going to read from Eugene Peterson's paraphrase the Message. "Everything—and I do mean everything—connected with that old way of life has to go. It's rotten through and through. Get rid of it! And then take on an entirely new way of life—a God-fashioned life, a life renewed from the inside and working itself into your conduct as God accurately reproduces his character in you" (Ephesians 4 MSG).

Those who are in Christ are being formed, re-formed, by the Spirit of God; a life renewed from the inside and working itself into things like how we talk to each other. You see, we *have been made new* in Jesus Christ and we *are being made new* in Jesus Christ.

Years ago, I was listening to speaker at a conference, and she said something that caught my ears and have been tumbling around in my thoughts ever since. She spoke about, having "nothing to protect and nothing to prove." Because of Jesus, of what God has done in Jesus Christ, of who I am in Jesus Christ, I, I have nothing to protect and nothing to prove." How could that be? Because we are talking about a God-fashioned Life. Because God, Creator God, spoke

creation into being. Out of chaos, the Living God spoke order and beauty. By speaking! By using words! God spoke: Light! And there was light. God said: let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness. So God created mankind, in the image of God He created them, male and female. God who created me, my inmost being. God who knit me together in my mother's womb. And God who spoke His creation into being, this God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son. Jesus, the Word of God incarnate, fully God and fully man. Jesus who is Himself the Truth.

Jesus speaks words of life and grace, freedom and forgiveness, mercy and healing. Do you hear His voice? To the tax collector, leading a life of fraud and shame, Jesus says, "Come, follow me. There is a place here for you in my company." To the woman caught in adultery, awaiting her death sentence, Jesus speaks these words over her, "Neither do I condemn you, go now and leave your life of sin. I do not condemn you." To the woman who pours out her perfume, all that she has, on Jesus, this lavish display of love, while others mock her and question her for what she has done, Jesus speaks these words of dignity and honor, "She has done a beautiful thing to me." He sees her and her act of worship.

Do you hear His voice? To the raging storm, the Lord says, "Quiet! Be still!" and the wind obeys His command. The wind responds to the sound of His voice. To the paralytic man lowered through the roof and placed at the feet of Jesus, Jesus said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven." To the dead man in the tomb, Jesus calls out in a loud voice, "Lazarus come out!" And then to those standing around, Jesus says, "Get those grave clothes off of him." And from the cross, as our Lord gave Himself up for us, an atoning sacrifice for our sins, Jesus said these words: It. Is. Finished. Jesus speaks these words, these words of salvation. Of rescue. Of redemption. It is finished. Do you hear the voice of the Lord speaking to you? Freedom from condemnation, release from shame, peace in the storm, forgiveness for your sins and healing and wholeness for your life.

When my son Luke was born, in those first few minutes of his life, they handed him to me in the delivery room. I got to speak the first words to him. A weighty moment, right? The first words ever spoken to a person. And so they laid him in my arms, and I said, "Hi." I know, profound. I was tired. But I kept going. Hi, we love you. Beloved boy. We are so glad you are here. You are our beloved son.

I got to be this voice of love, welcoming him into the world. And with God's help, I will continue to be a voice of love in his life. And frankly, that is just a glimmer, a faint reflection of the voice of the Lord, the voice of your Creator, Sustainer, Savior, the voice of Love who speaks even now. The voice of the Lord who is speaking truth right now. Speaking life, speaking freedom.

Maybe you have been running for so long, so hard, you can't hear God's voice very well. Hearing from God, maybe that sounds like a pretty foreign concept. Maybe you feel like God has been pretty quiet for a while now. And yes there are a lot of others voices in our lives that have spoken hurt and

harm; sometimes it seems like those are the voices blaring in surround sound in our heart. And yet, the voice of the Lord comes to us. There is a voice of Love that spoke you into existence, that has been calling your name. A voice that called you to Himself, the Spirit of God, drawing you in. A voice speaks forgiveness and freedom. A voice that speaks truth and love. Even now. Even in this moment. The voice of our Lord who tells the truth about you. Romans 3:4, "Even if everyone else is a liar, God is true." The Lord speaks the truth of who you are.

In the Heidelberg Catechism, a teaching document from the Reformation era, we find these words, "I am not my own, but belong with body and soul, both in life and in death, to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from all the power of the devil."

You see I have nothing to prove—I belong to Jesus. And I have nothing to protect—I belong to Jesus. The voice that gets the first say in my life and the voice that gets the final say in my life is the voice of my Lord. I can dare to speak the truth because truth been spoken over me. I can use my words for good because goodness has been spoken over me. Jesus our Lord speaks with grace and truth. Reminding us our true name, declaring our true worth, calling us into our true purpose. And Jesus invites us to speak the same way.

I can speak generously and graciously to you. I don't need to waste my breath trying to make something of myself—remember, remember, I belong to Jesus. I am a child of God. This doesn't mean that I never speak a hard word, a challenging word, a prophetic word—but I am truly able to speak the truth in love because I am not coming from a place of defensiveness but freedom. I can use my words for good, for life, for healing.

In a meeting recently, I caught myself using my words to make myself look good. Someone corrected me and I didn't want to be corrected—I wanted to be the one with the right answer. I caught myself being sharper than I would like. And I walked away thinking, "Okay, where was that coming from? Jesus, remind me of who I am in You. Would You keep reshaping my heart as You speak truth?"

The voice that gets the first say in my life and the voice that gets the final say in my life is the voice of my Lord. I can dare to speak the truth because truth has been spoken over me. I can use my words for good because goodness has been spoken over me.

Try an experiment today. Take a few moments out of your day and simply ask the Lord this question: Lord, what do You want to say to me about who I am? Maybe you have been running for so long, so hard, you can't hear God's voice very well. And yes there are a lot of others voices in our lives that have spoken hurt and harm. And yet, the voice of the Lord comes to us. Take a few minutes today. Put down your phone, turn off the TV. Silence the noise. Just ask the Lord what the Lord wants to say to you. The voice that gets the first say in your life and the voice that gets the final say in your life is the voice of your Lord.

## STUDY GUIDE

### LORD • EXODUS 20:16; EPHESIANS 4:25, 29–32

#### **UP:** Connect With God Through Spending Time in God's Word

Read aloud the passages for the week: Exodus 20:16 and Ephesians 4:25, 29–32. Silently reflect on what you heard. Underline phrases that seem meaningful.

- This command forbids using words to destroy others, particularly if we have the upper hand. Where in our society have you seen words destroy people?
- How does obeying this command lead to a more full life?
- How do you define "gossip?" What are the effects of gossip?
- This command not only refers to telling untruths about people, but also speaks to the way in which we utilize the truth. Reformer John Calvin observed, "We delight in a certain poisoned sweetness experienced in ferreting out and in disclosing the evils of others...." What kinds of experiences have you had with this "poisoned sweetness?"
- Have you ever told half-truths about someone, twisted someone's words or re-told a story in a way that made you look like a hero and everyone else like a dummy? Why?
- Jesus is the Lord of our voice. Our words should bless and build up, they should encourage and speak truth. How could you practice these things in the coming week?

#### **OUT:** Connect With the World Around Us by Joining God in God's Mission

Is there someone in your life who could use some words of encouragement? What could you say to encourage them this week?

#### **IN:** Connect With the Family of God

Spend some time in prayer for the people you have harmed with your voice in the past. Is it possible for you to reach out and ask them for forgiveness this week?