**Shallow: Conversations
Pastor Henry Sweeney
February 28, 2021**

**Week 3 –**

Bumper:

Key Verse: Eph. 4:29 “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouth, but only that which is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those that listen.”

It is great to be with you Southside.

I am Pastor Henry Sweeney. I get the privilege to serve two roles. I am the Congregational Care Pastor for Southside Church, but I also have the opportunity to serve as Guardian Christian Academy’s Dean of Student Life.

I count it a privilege to be able to share God’s word with you today as we wrap up this sermon series Shallow.

Over the past few weeks, we have looked at some ways in which we can strengthen our bond between one another.

Two weeks ago, Pastor Sharon Little also the Dean of Spiritual life at GCA, shared with us how some relationships can leave us unfulfilled. She showed us that we need to evaluate our current relationships and see which ones need to go from shallow to deep.

Last week Pastor Wynne Lankford our lead pastor here at Southside, shared with us the importance of commitment. He shared how through, humility, gentleness, patience, tolerance, and unity that we can have deeply committed relationships.

This week we will be delving into our conversations.

Let us go back in time for a minute. Do you remember when you first learned to speak?

Now if you are like me that was a little while ago.

I do not remember the first words I said, but I am sure it was mom, dad, or food.

After those first few words came more words and before the world knew it, I was formulating sentences and speaking thoughts into existence.

That is the same way it is with each one of us. At some point we spoke our first words and eventually those words became conversations.

These days verbal communication is not that difficult. In fact, some might even say that it comes easy to them.

A recent study out of the University of Arizona claimed that the average America speaks about 16,000 words per day. Now I do not know about you, but as an educator, I often feel that I speak way more than that.

To give you an example of what 16,000 words looks like, I am going to recite the first 16,000 words in the dictionary. Just kidding.

Let’s do the math. If you subtract 8 hours for sleep, which I am sure all of us get on a regular basis, and about 2 hours for eating, that leaves about 14 hours. Now if we divide that 16000 by 14 hours that would equal 1143, roughly, words per hour.

I bet you didn’t think you would be hearing a math problem in a sermon. Now if we take that 1143 and divide it by 60 minutes that equals 19 words per minute.

That gives you a rough idea as to how many words the average person speaks in a minute. Pretty impressive right!

We live in 2021! And communication is not always verbal. I have a cell phone. I text. Are ready for some more numbers.

**SLIDE 1 (text messages)** According to Statistic Brain, Americans send and receive about 26 billion text messages a day. Around 302,000 texts per second and if you do the math that would be 9.4 trillion texts a year.

Text Request, another statistic company says that the average American sends 97 texts a day. That’s a lot of nonverbal communication.

Now these stats do not include social media, which is a trend that we have to deal with. It is a whole lot “easier” to have a conversation when its not face to face. The problem is those conversations are usually of little value.

Statistics are nice but there is more to the story, but statistics give way to truth and truth comes from meaning.

Now when I say meaning, I don’t mean the definition, I mean depth.

Every 3rd Friday I have the chance to sit down with our GCA seniors for coffee and conversation. It started as a onetime event back in October.

I was looking for a way to let the senior class enjoy something a little different. We began that Friday at about 7:30 am. Now if you know students you understand that this in and of itself is a monumental feat.

The goal was never to get some deep theological conversation going, or for me to open some deep dark secret. Rather the goal was just to have time where we could share with each other and they could share with me.

That first one in October was painful. We gathered for coffee in my office and everyone just kind of sat there. I thought this was not going like I thought it would.

They were so chatty during the school day. I marked that as one of those things that I did once, and it was ok.

Well, that following Monday when the seniors arrived they begin asking when we were planning our next one and if we could do that every Friday.

I am sure it was because there was coffee, btu I said I would look and see what I could do. When their invitations did not come by the end of the week, I was being hounded.

I planned another Friday morning. November 6th was the planned date. I remember that it was pouring down rain. One of those heavy rains that doesn’t let up.

I thought, surely none of them would show up. Well, I was wrong. 5 of the 9 showed up and they were early. They were let into my office by another staff member.

When I got there, they were sitting around talking, having conversations. Now I am not going to tell you all the details for the conversations, but they invited me into their conversations.

It was the awkward kind when you don’t know what to say. They asked what I thought about certain topics and how I would process a certain spiritual matter.

They were having deep conversations. There were some tears and a whole lot of laughter. One thing was apparent, they enjoyed going deeper with our conversations.

The students sitting around an office table weren't there for some deep theological conversation or to see how many words that I knew in Greek or Hebrew, they were simply wanted fellowship.

They were there sharing caring loving and supporting one another. It was exactly what one of our core values is at GCA and what one of our core values is at Southside which is to understand that no one climbs alone.

This is a journey a journey that we take together not a journey that we take on our own. This group of seniors helped me understand that in a different way.

Well fast forward to when I returned to school from having Covid and losing my mother and the first words out of one of the seniors’ mouths was, “I don’t mean to seem insensitive, but we are still having coffee on Friday right?”

I had been told by administration to take the time I needed, but the reality was that our scheduled coffee time was the reason I came back when I did. We got together to decorate cookies and during that time we talked about life.

One of them asked me to share my story! I was elated. We were having meaningful conversation. I look forward to those Friday’s now. They are a highlight of my job as at GCA.

More than being a highlight of my job at GCA it showed me something. This encounter showed me that students, people desire deep conversations. People cherish these moments when words have meaning.

The problem is that far too often we shy away from these conversations. They make us uncomfortable. In this fast-paced world that we live in these conversations take too much of our precious time.

But I ask you, is there anything more meaningful than sitting with a friend and going deeper in your relationship with one another and potentially deepening their and our understanding of Christ in their life?

Do we know how to have a conversation?

I did a quick internet search of the Library of Congress, and on a side note, if you have never visited the Library of Congress you should go visit. Among the millions of books there are more than 1000 books written about conversation just in the post 2 years.

Some of them about specific topics, but many of them just about how to have a conversation. The art of a conversation is being lost in our society.

Let’s use this setting (motion to the chairs and table) and dissect a conversation for a moment.

Did you know that there are multiple pieces to a conversation?

You have the speaker, the listener, and the words.

The listener (sit someone in the chair): This is the person… you guessed it… who listens. 1 year of Lena Welsh’s Interpersonal Communications class taught me that definition.

Now role in the conversation is to sit there and be interested in the topic. There are occasions where the listener doesn’t really listen but rather just hears. That’s a different sermon for a different day.

Then you have the speaker (sit in the chair): This person … you guessed it… speaks. Now this is the person that has the most impact on the direction and tone of the conversation.

Their responsibility in the conversation is to vocalize words and string them together in coherent thought to make their point. This person holds the power in the conversation.

Sometimes that power gets to be too much, and the speaker hogs the conversation and has a hard time making their point and the listener loses interest.

You ever been in one of those conversations where the listener (you) tries to say something, and the speaker just keeps talking? I have and it’s not enjoyable at all.

Now those are both important pieces, but the most important part of the conversation are the words that are spoken. Words must be present in a conversation for that conversation to have meaning. They bring life into otherwise meaningless moments.

**SLIDE 2-5** Matthew 12:34-37 “For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. **35**A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. **36**But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. **37**For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.”

You see the words that we speak have a direct correlation with what is in our hearts. The depth of our conversation comes from what is inside. Our thoughts, cares, concerns, motives, and desires are born through the words that we speak. That’s the way that God created each one of us.

How do we formulate words?

Words do not come out of thin air.

We shape them and give them life using our tongues and our voice.

**SLIDE 6** James 3:5 tells us “Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark.”

The tongue is powerful. The tongue brings life to our thoughts and the words that we speak create the reality in which we live.

Our words become the most powerful weapon that we have, both for the positive and for the negative.

Words the power to destroy.

They split churches. They cause rifts in society. They have started wars.

But words also have the power to create. The power to unite churches. They bring unity to a broken world.

Words expose our hearts and show us what is in our heart and who we truly are.

The world we create we create with our words.

We must learn the importance and impact of our words.

Scripture gives us information regarding our conversations and our words.

In all of Paul’s letters there are two parts. The first half of the book usually explains how we interact and encounter God. The way we understand God and His presence in the world paired with how we respond to God. The second half of the letter usually explains how we are/do interact with others.

You want to know how to avoid shallow relationships, shallow commitments, and shallow conversations, read a letter from Paul.

In this sermon series we find ourselves in the book of Ephesians. In this book Paul writes a letter to a church that needed to be reminded that the way they interacted with those around them was a direct relation to their identity in Christ.

There problem was our problem. They needed to be reminded that they are a representation of Christ to those around them.

Ephesians chapter 1-3 explains their and our relationship with Christ. Chapter 4 begins to help us understand what we need to look out for as others see our representation of Christ in us. It serves as a great reminder.

I used to start every school year with this verse attached to a poster on my wall. I always told my students this reminded this there were some very important things about the words that we said in the words that came out of their mouths.

**SLIDE 7** Ephesians chapter 4 verse 29 makes a blunt statement regarding our words. “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouth, but only that which is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those that listen.”

First we have a direct description of what not to do. Notice that he doesn’t start with a suggestion.

He doesn’t say, “if” but starts with a declarative statement. It starts with do not. You can’t get much more direct than that. He is starting by saying it happening, so we must address it.

Then he tells us what we should not do. Do not let any wholesome talk come out of your mouth.

What is unwholesome? Webster defines unwholesome is corrupt or unsound. It is that which causes a person to be torn down.

Paul is addressing a problem that they have.

I imagine, much like today, that there were some “church folks” saying some not so pleasant things.

We often find ourselves doing the same things today.

**SLIDE 8** We may not come right out and say some corrupt or unsound things, but what we post on social media or what we like and dislike on Facebook are ways in which we have unwholesome words coming out of our mouth.

Out of the mouth comes what is in the heart.

I know some people that will not friend me on Facebook or allow me to follow them on other social media platforms because they know that what they are posting is contrary to what I believe.

Friends that is not the way it should be, and Paul explains that.

Paul flips it for us. He says now that I have told you what not to do here is how you fix it.

Paul says here is what it would look like. Out of our mouth and through our fingertips should come words that are meant to build each other up and benefit people.

Now if I am reading this correctly that means that those conversations that we have with our friends need to by beneficial and uplifting.

I believe the problem with the church in Ephesus is a problem that we face today. we don't know the impact of our actions and we don't know the impact of our words until it's too late.

Once they're out there they're out there we can't take them back. Sometimes we wish we could but once they're out there out.

We must ask ourselves, what are your words look like?

What are words sound like?

What are the words you're using?

And are they intentional?

Remember what Jesus warned us in Matthew chapter 12 out of our mouths comes what's in your heart so really it's a heart issue.

Now I have been around long enough that in my 43 years of life, I have not always heard words of affirmation come out of people. In the recent days we are hearing more and more words that are tearing people apart.

We hear words of hatred and violence and not words of love and compassion. We are allowing media to influence what people need to hear and not what the Lord is telling us to say. We are diving into the shallow end of the conversation pool because that is what everyone else is doing.

Our words matter. What we say matters. Those 16,000 words that we speak are important and influence people. Paul shows us that we need to be careful because of our words.

Paul urges us to watch the words that come out of our mouth. He reminds us that those words need to be words that edify one another, that build each other up and that develop deeper spiritual friendships.

These need to be words that have meaning and have depth. They don't need to be shallow thoughts across our minds on a whim.

They need to be born out of our hearts desire to spur one another on to drive each other to deeper and more meaningful relationships with Christ.

But today we are We are pushing aside Christ centered thoughts with the noise and chaos of the world because it is convenient.

We need to give up the convenient and focus on what really matters. We need to give up the status symbol that is self-centeredness put others before our own agenda.

We must excuse ourselves from some of the shallow conversations of the world to shine the light of the Gospel.

But these conversations do not come easy. Remember back to what I said earlier these conversations take time and effort which means that we must meaningfully take time and be patient without one another.

We are all busy. I remember back to July 1995. I was getting ready to head into my Senior High School when a member of our church saw me sitting in the picnic table outside of the camp meeting Tabernacle.

While the service was going on he made his way back to my table and sat with me and ask me questions deep meaningful questions.

What like a Long story short that those conversations led to a spiritual awakening in my own life? He had taken the time and effort to come sit with a teenager.

To this day I still consider that man a friend of mine and still keep in contact with him. It was a conversation that led to growth and continued growth even to this day. But the question

There is no other way to escape the self-centeredness than to guard our words and thoughts and focus them on the cross.

We need to avoid involving ourselves in shallow conversations.

But how does a person do that?

**SLIDE 9** First we must desire to spend time with one another.

You can't go deep in a friendship without being willing to spend time with a person. Some of my favorite times have been in intentional moments like this setting.

Two chairs around a small table and of course there has to be coffee. For these moments are not shallow moments.

Some of these moments have been life changing moments. Some of these moments have been moments of decision. Some of these moments have been moments filled with words of strength and power.

These moments have been filled with joy and laughter. These moments have been filled with tears and sorrow. But it is in these moments that deep spiritual conversations happen.

It is around a setting like this where change can happen where love can be found where Christ can move and where his love can abound. It is in a setting like this where we can be real and honest with each other.

We can be open we can share, and we can grow together. That is the goal of deep conversations. To take time to sit and to listen.

I said to a group of students the other day some of the most sobering times in my ministry have been times when I just sat and listened. I did not try to solve problems. I did not try to rearrange their social calendar. But I just sat and listened.

**SLIDE 10** Second we must understand that the conversation that we are having may not be about us.

In the world we live in today it is easy to be selfish and driven by selfish intent. Do not believe me just look at the media the media drives home the fact that is all about you and you're the most important person that exists.

But in deep meaningful spiritual conversations it is not about you.

Ultimately it is not even about the two people sitting together around table having coffee.

The point of deep spiritual conversations is always God. If we remember the God is the most important thing in our conversation then our conversation ceased to be shallow and take on a whole new meaning in life.

Once we desire to spend time together with their value it what we are saying to one another. With the remember that the listener is always listening.

Now I know that might seem natural your listener, so you are always going to listen, but I mean they're truly listening to the words that you say. Your words have power. Your words have meaning. Your words have depth. And your words can change their life.

So, what are we saying? What are the words coming out of our mouths? are the words coming out of our mouths, much like Paul warned us, words that tear each other apart or are they words that lift each other up.

Where do you find yourselves at in the conversation pool?

Are you satisfied with following the world and living in the shallow end of the pool or are you desiring to go deeper?

If Matthew chapter 12 is correct and our words come out of our hearts than we must guard our hearts.

Maybe we need our hearts need to be worked on and molded by Christ. Maybe our hearts need a surgeon, and we need to rely on Him to help us guard our words and allow those words become, as Paul reminds us, words become useful and uplifting.

Are we willing to follow the command of Christ and guard our hearts and our words?

Are we willing to let Christ become the one that moves us past the shallow meaningless words into words of deep growth and deeper conversations?

Wrap Up –

**SLIDE 11** Southside Groups