

The Good Story

CONNECT *BREAK THE ICE AND GET PEOPLE TALKING*

- What's your favorite kind of fruit?
- When you get stressed out, what kind of things do you say to yourself to try and cope?
- Do you find it easy to pay compliments to other people? Why or why not?

TRUTH *UNDERSTAND AND DISCUSS THE SCRIPTURE'S MEANING*

READ: Matthew 12:33-37

Easter might be behind us, but the impact of Easter is far from over. In this series, The Good Story, we're going to look at the inner change that the gospel creates, and how that inner change affects things outwardly. We'll look at a number of areas – attitude, thoughts, emotions – and we're going to start with... words. In Matthew 12, Jesus explains the importance of words and what words show about what's going on under the surface.

Where Our Words Come From

READ: Matthew 12:33-34

DISCUSS: How does Jesus's analogy of a tree and fruit help us understand the impact of good and evil words?

Words might come from the mouth, but they originate in the heart. Many of us (probably all) have said something unkind or angry and then followed it with, "I'm not sure where that came from." Now we know. There are two kinds of fruit—good fruit and evil (or rotten) fruit. If our words are going to be like good fruit—nourishing, strengthening, and helpful—then we must deal with what's going on in our hearts. Good words can only come from a good heart.

What Exposes Our Heart's Treasure

READ: Matthew 12:22-24,35

DISCUSS: Do you think Jesus is being unfair to the Pharisees? Why or why not?

Imagine being called a "brood of vipers." Intense. But I guess it's a fitting response to being called "the prince of demons." Jesus isn't just being a jerk, however. He's illustrating how the Pharisees' rotten words expose their evil hearts. A little background is helpful: Jesus turned the religious norm of the time on its head, and many of the Pharisees were willing to do anything to protect the norm. Moments when our lives are turned upside down always brings whatever's hiding in our hearts to the surface. It's not always comfortable, but until we face up to what's hiding in our hearts, we won't be able to do what's necessary to get our heart to a good place.

GRACE *SEE HOW THE PASSAGE CONNECTS TO JESUS*

The Only Way to a Good Heart

READ: Matthew 12:36-37

DISCUSS: What do you think these verses mean?

When Jesus tells the Pharisees that their words will either justify or condemn them, he doesn't mean that their good words will be weighed against their bad words and hopefully they get a passing grade. He means that their words *about him* will be the determining factor. Justification is a gift given to those who believe that Jesus is who he says he is – our Savior and Lord, the Son of God, the Word made flesh. Those who speak this all-important, good word are already justified. And those who are justified by faith receive a new heart (Ezekiel 36:26). Out of this renewed heart good words grow, like ripe fruit that strengthens and nourishes.

CHANGE *APPLY THE PASSAGE TO OUR THOUGHTS, FEELINGS, AND ACTIONS*

- What has our current crisis brought to the surface in your own heart, and how do you find it affecting your words?
- Jesus called the Pharisees' words "careless." How are you doing at "taking care" with your words during this crisis? Are you taking responsibility for your words in the way you should?
- Who has God called you to speak good words of truth and encouragement to?

PRAYER *RESPOND TO THE PASSAGE IN PRAYER*

- Spend time glorifying Jesus for who he is.
- Pray for an awareness of what's being exposed in our hearts during this crisis, and how the good story of the gospel ministers to that.

Discipleship Check-In

- Have you read your Bible consistently the past week?
- Who is someone you're praying to share Jesus with this week, and what's one way you can love them well?