



## **Choosing Your Words Wisely**

How powerful are words, and how do you choose the words you say or don't say?

BELIEVES was excited to host a dynamic panel discussion focused on this and more on June 11<sup>th</sup> as Paula Gwynn Grant (Communications Director at the Archdiocese of Atlanta), Dan Johnson (Creative and Communications Director at Peachtree Church), and Mart Martin (Founder and Facilitator of 3 Key Questions) engaged in a discussion about "Choosing Your Words Wisely."



To get the conversation started, the three panelists first spoke of how they wound up in the professional roles they're in now.

Johnson, who graduated from the University of Georgia with a degree in radio and television, and then worked in the television industry for 11-12 years, said when the opportunity with Peachtree Church came up in recent years, it was a fit because he's a storyteller.

"I had the opportunity to be in Chip Ingram's mentoring program, PrimeMovers, based on Bob Buford's book, *Half Time*," Johnson shared. "There's a narrative about what Christians are against versus for – I believe there's an opportunity and responsibility to tell the story of how love is our primary motivation."

Grant, who is originally from Washington, D.C., and spent 25 years in radio and television, focused her opening remarks on the belief that God puts us right where we're supposed to be when we need.

"When 9-11 happened, there were no commercials for a while. Since I made my living as a radio announcer, my husband and I had to make quick adjustments. This made me think a lot," she said.

What she thought about included what she would do going forward in her professional career.

"I looked in the classifieds, which I literally had never done before," Grant stated. "When I saw a role with the Fulton County TV station, I applied but didn't get it. However, through this, I was informed the Fulton County Commissioner Chair's office needed a Constituent Relations leader."

Grant applied and got the role – finding that she could draw from all her TV and communications background in government roles.

"A commissioners meeting is a live show with people bringing real situations," Grant commented.

After working in government for many years, in 2009, Grant applied for the Archdiocese of Atlanta's Communications Director role, but didn't get it. Instead she went to work for Mercy Housing.

"I learned how church really worked through the sisters."



Then four years later, she returned to the government sector when DeKalb County came calling because they were facing some crises. Within a couple of years, however, the Archdiocese of Atlanta's Communications Director role opened again so she applied, and this time she got an interview.

"I was nervous interviewing with Archbishop Gregory."

Grant, who has been the Archdiocese's Communications Director since 2014, shared there have been numerous confirmation moments that this is where she is supposed to be.

Martin then jumped in the conversation piggybacking off of the focus of Grant's remarks.

"I can totally relate to 'where God wants you,'" he said.

Martin, who came to Atlanta in 1985, had worked for the Special Olympics in Mississippi and Louisiana previously. Once in Atlanta, he went on to work for Coca-Cola for 20 years.

Then he found himself wrestling with what to do next.

"One conversation that stood out was with an HR person at Coca-Cola who wasn't the HR person I usually dealt with," Martin stated. "I shared with him confidentially that I was considering leaving but anxious about leaving the security of a job with Coca-Cola, to which replied, 'You need to figure out who your security is in.'"

Martin said the comment was startling coming from someone he hadn't normally dealt with and made the decision to leave his corporate job easier.

Shortly thereafter, Martin left Coca-Cola and went to work for Jackson Spalding, a 35-person firm at the time that now has 175 team members. Martin continued with Jackson Spalding until this past year when he discerned to go out solo to start his own consulting firm – 3 Key Questions.

With the focus of the BELIEVES session being on "Choosing Your Words Wisely," the panelists were asked to share how they approach what they do with that in mind.

"Not surprisingly, we always lead with the truth," Johnson said. "Integrity is based on truth. Particularly in crises, truth is key – especially in areas of faith."

Johnson also emphasized the importance being meticulous in word selection has been at Peachtree Church.

"I'm an IFNJ in Myers Briggs, so we're meticulous in word selection. With Peachtree's mission statement, we picked words that have meaning and invite people."

Grant followed Johnson's remarks re-emphasizing the importance of truth.

"First, tell the truth because you don't have anything to remember and trip yourself up," she said.

Then she added, "This is not always the case in government work where full truth may not be desired or able to be divulged for legal or confidentiality reasons."

In her role as Communications Director, Grant stated that other parties, like the legal team, will always say their view while participating in the decision process to help finalize what is publicly said. Grant says she must balance this input while remembering the core of what needs to be communicated.

"In the end, it's very much about the words – not just what you say, but what you don't say. Say what you know, what you don't know, and what you're not sure of now but can get back to people on when known. Then think, 'What would my reaction be if I heard what I just said?'"

Being in a different role than Johnson and Grant, the focus of Martin's thoughts were a bit different.



"I focus on helping companies and organizations develop their mission statement and core values," he said. "I look at multiple dictionaries to dig into word meaning so they're not 'wallpaper words.'"

"They can all sound the same. You want something that means something and have to dig into it," Martin explained. "It's important to also say things the way people speak and are simple. For example, the Chick-fil-A Foundation's mission statement – 'We exist to help every child become all they were created to be.' – is very clear and has meaning."

Johnson then chimed in.

"We just went through a vision process at Peachtree Church, landing on the following values: unexpected togetherness, gentle reverence, and disruptive compassion – compassion that disrupts the life of the receiver with something needed, and the giver because his or her heart changes."

Listening to Johnson speak of Peachtree Church's chosen values, Martin commented, "They're simple and invite you to want to know what they mean."

Grant added, "This is great, but it's also clear – which is so important."

CTK Parishioner Fernando Silva then asked, "In a company I've been with, there's the saying, 'People don't care what you know until they know that you care.' How do you coach others to be authentic?"

"Demonstrate it by action," Johnson remarked. "Young people in particular are looking for this. They want to see the only motive is love."

Grant commented, “The key is to be accessible and available. Silence can be misinterpreted. If I, as a recipient, have to ask, I don’t trust. It helps to give what you know. With the Catholic Church, it can be a challenge to coordinate communications since it’s so large.”

Building off of Grant’s comments about the challenges of coordinating communications, Martin added, “It’s important to equip people with information to answer questions they face.”

Stepping away from the focus on their professional roles, the panelists were then asked how they choose their words wisely in prayer, and work through what’s going on in their worlds to know that you’re landing in a spot where you’re ‘present’ and being Spirit-led.

“We’ve all been through crises in our lives,” said Johnson. “Psalms is a book of peaks and valleys. When I am in a prolonged valley state, I go to Psalms. There’s permission in them to be honest with God. God is OK with us being angry, telling Him what’s bothering us. My main thing is to be honest in prayer, and to want God’s will.”

Johnson added the other thing is to listen, and hear the quiet, peaceful response from the Spirit.

“You know it when you hear it.”

Then he says it’s important to seek out confirmation from those in your life.

Like Johnson, Grant says she’s drawn to Psalms too.

“In the Catholic faith tradition, that’s my favorite part – the Responsorial Psalm,” she said. “Everything is in Psalms – joy, sorrow, sadness, everything.”

In her prayer life, Grant says she deals with noise all day, so her prayer life is quite the opposite.

“I go quiet. Peace. ‘Be still and know I’m God.’ I don’t want to get lost, so I go still. Answers come in the stillness. Test it and see. Be still.”

That stillness happened for Grant in each of the three interviews for the role she is in as the Archdiocese’s Communications Director.

“Then on the third day in the job, I was in a conference room for a meeting,” she recalled. “I had never been there before, but the room looked familiar. Nine years prior, this conference room had been in a dream but I couldn’t see the faces. Those moments of stillness let me know God’s voice, presence, and confirmation.”



Martin added his thoughts on the question by sharing how he begins his day with prayer.

“I begin the day at 5 AM,” he stated. “I like structure. I pray a pattern for prayer that is similar to ACTS (Adoration, Contrition, Thanksgiving, Supplication). It’s Thanksgiving, Confession, Intercession (praying for others) and Petition (praying for my own needs) and I list those things in a journal each morning. Then at the end of the year, I review all that I noted in writing and it’s amazing to see what seemed so overwhelming at the time, but then seeing how it’s been answered.”

Martin was then asked, “Do you ever pray and then realize why when encountering someone later?”

“Yes,” he responded. “One time I was suddenly convicted to pray for the founder of our agency, Glen Jackson. I go to see Glen as soon as I get in and he says, ‘My mom died last night.’”

With time in the session coming to a close, Grant, Martin, and Johnson were asked if they were only able to verbally communicate three phrases throughout their life, what would they be, and why.

“First, I’d choose no words at all,” Grant answered. “We’re a global company. I would choose no words so that language isn’t an issue. It challenges us. Kindness doesn’t need words. So, first go non-verbal to connect.”

And Martin’s three phrases?

“I’d go with questions to start a conversation and go deep – What do you believe? What’s your purpose? How can I pray for you?”

Then Johnson spoke.

“The three phrases I try to live by are ...

- Trust in the Lord with all your heart (which is hard to do)
- Lean not on your own understanding (the world guides us in the opposite direction)
- In all your ways, acknowledge Him

... I find when I do these three things, stuff works out,” he said.

And what do they advise doing when words aren’t chosen wisely?

“Be genuine about what you say – not ‘sorry, but not sorry’ – and do it quickly,” Grant replied. “It is how you handle it. Reasonable people would expect you would own it, then say what you’ll do about it.”

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