

# The Power of the Word

07/16/17

**Isa 45:19** I publicly proclaim bold promises. I do not whisper obscurities in some dark corner so no one can understand what I mean. And I did not tell the people of Israel to ask me for something I did not plan to give. I, the LORD, speak only what is true and right.

What a powerful proclamation: I speak only what is true and what is right.

Every Mother teaches: if you haven't got something nice to say, don't say anything at all. Another saying I like: It is better to remain silent and have people think you a fool than to open your mouth and remove all doubt.

A couple of weeks ago I alluded to the power of the spoken word when I said that our words can be powerful allies or powerful enemies. Words are potent. God "spoke into existence" all of creation. As Children of God, we are able, to a lesser extent, capable of speaking into creation our own circumstances. The God within us calls into existence the things that do not exist. (Romans 4:17) As I have mentioned, the declaration comes first and then the manifestation.

Divinely guided words, thoughts, and actions help create and maintain peace in this world. They are the medium through which we share love, respect, joy, compassion, and understanding.

In Matthew 12:37, it is written “By your words you are justified; by your words you are condemned”. It is our word, spoken and written, that defines who we are. In particular, it is the words we speak in our idle time, when we are with friends and don’t think anyone else is listening. It is during our private times that we reveal our true nature.

It is one thing to publicly state positive ideas about a subject, so that we can manipulate and mislead others, yet revile the same issue in private. We call this two-faced, or unauthentic.

Words can heal and nourish. Job 4:4 says, “Your words have supported those who were stumbling, and you have made firm the feeble knees.”

There was a man who wrote in to a newspaper columnist that he thought it was useless for churches to offer up talks and sermons because he hadn’t ever remembered one. So what good are they? The Columnist responded that for over 50 years his wife has offered up complete and varied menus of delicious food which has nourished him and sustained him, but he cannot for the life of him remember the specifics of any particular meal. Does that mean the food that his wife has given him is useless?

There is an organization called *Word Can Heal*. Their pledge is this:

**I pledge to think more about the words I use.**

**I will try to see how gossip hurts people, including myself, and to work to eliminate it from my life.**

**I will try to replace words that hurt with words that encourage, engage and enrich.**

**I will not become discouraged when I am unable to choose words perfectly, because making the world a better place is hard work.**

**And I pledge to do that, one word at a time.**

We can commit to the idea of the Words Can Heal pledge or we can use our words recklessly and be a Dot Person, an Appraiser, or a Gossip.

A Gossip, as we all know, is someone who tries to bring attention to themselves by divulging private and personal information about others, whether it is true or not, without permission. Gossipers use words to make themselves feel powerful by defaming another person's reputation. This is an insidious habit: to belittle others and spread lies.

Ephesians 4:29 teaches, *“Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear”*.

The challenge is to not let anything negative or critical leave your lips. The easiest way to do that is not to let anything negative or critical remain in your mind. I have heard that thoughts held in mind produce after their own kind. What we hold in our mind attracts to us in similar fashion.

Become the type of person that people want to be around: positive, accepting, non-critical, non-judgmental, and light-hearted.

A study was done of some of the longest lived persons. What they expected to find was that there were some sort of dietary or environmental similarities. Instead, what they found was that 90% of these people had positive attitudes, forgave others quickly, and refrained from complaining. Their attitudes kept them living longer and happier.

I've read about three filters through which all words we speak or allow to be spoken, should pass. They are: Is it kind? Is it true? Is it necessary? Certainly, my jokes in church do not always pass through those filters. But jokes are a special case, with the intent to bring joy from a ridiculous circumstance.

They are not the same as a personal assault followed by "I'm just kidding." I find that as offensive and hurtful as a gossip.

Words can drive people away and make them feel uncomfortable, defensive, and awkward, or they can put people at ease and make them feel welcome and appreciated. Sometimes, out of ignorance, we cause people discomfort.

For instance, someone shows up at church with a wrap on their wrist or a Band-Aid on their forehead. If we are reacting habitually, we will go up and immediately ask, “What happened?” Of course, every person they meet asks the same thing and they have to tell their story eight or ten times.

If the person is sensitive to how they obtained their condition, being asked questions places them in a compromised situation. We, who love them, are simply showing concern.

I would like to suggest a solution. Instead of asking them a question like, “How did this happen, or what happened.” Why not simply say something like, “I will be praying for a quick healing of your wrist (or leg, or whatever the condition is).” This does a couple important things. It shows our concern, and at the same time it allows them dignity. If they want to talk about it they will, but they are not cornered into having to tell you that they don’t want to talk about it if they are uncomfortable.

Conversely, if it is you who has the Band-Aid and someone asks you what happened, just lovingly say, “Thank you for your concern. Pray for a quick healing.”

Sadly, this will not stop everyone from prying and pressing the issue. But acknowledging in a kind way that you are not comfortable talking about the details should be enough.

Of course, there are those who will take that information and start spreading it around to others within the church and everyone they meet. Why? Because they like to gossip.

Now let me say that I am not saying any of this to make someone feel bad. The situations I am using are fictitious and are not meant to point a finger. I am only illuminating areas in which we all can become more aware. If, you recognize your behavior, as I have as I was writing this talk, then perhaps we can make some adjustments.

Many of our hurtful words do not come because they are unkind, or untrue. They fall under the category of “Is it necessary?” I have read of a behavioral classification labeled Dot People. Dot People are those that can look at something beautiful and be drawn to the flaw – the speck on the otherwise pristine canvas. They then feel the obligation to point out the flaw or speck to everyone. These are Dot People. They tend to spot light the obvious, and it tends to be the negative.

You can be looking at a beautiful sunset and the Dot Person will notice the traffic noise or the plane disrupting the view. Somehow the beauty is lost to them as they focus exclusively on the negative.

Another category of pushing people away by saying things that are unnecessary is the Appraiser. We can be a Praiser or an Appraiser. We can tell someone, “I really like your outfit,” or we can tell, “You really look tired today. Are you feeling well?” No, it isn’t unkind, it may be true from your perspective, but is it necessary? I have found that most people aren’t coming to church or to a social engagement to have their health questioned. Many people just like to share their negative opinions about things with others. Let us strive to praise others, point out their best, most attractive qualities.

As Proverbs 19:9 says, “Whoever would foster love covers over an offense, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends.”

In fact, the Bible – both Testaments – have much to say about words. In Ephesians 4:29 we read: *Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.*

James 1:26 -- *Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless.*

Proverbs 10:18 *Whoever conceals hatred with lying lips and spreads slander is a fool.*

Again, are we pushing people away, or drawing them towards the Christ? Are we being compassionate or unthinking.

And finally, the words that we use to ourselves, and about ourselves, must follow the same guidelines. Patrick, it is not true that you are incompetent in most areas. It is just that you are not trained in those areas. You could be quite competent if you studied them.

See, there are often times extraneous thoughts filling our minds, and whispers spoken to ourselves in a constant dialogue about ourselves. “You’re such a loser. Ok, that was better. There you go again, you bumbling idiot. Why do you always do that?” There is just a constant negative judgment about our behavior.

How about we take that Words Can Heal pledge and apply it to ourselves. “I will try to replace words that hurt with words that encourage, engage and enrich.” We are worthy and deserving of consideration and respect, as is everyone.

My prayer is that we can become more aware of the words that we use toward ourselves and others and make them more caring, understanding, and kind. May they be necessary, kind, and true, and may we keep our tongues silent as offenses occur. And as we do this, the people around us will learn that there are other ways to respond to a situation and they will consider change. But first, let us become the understanding, kindness, and love that we seek in the world and let it begin with our words.

Let us pray....