

How Your Words of Wisdom Can Goad People Toward God

The memory makes me smile now, but at the time I wanted to screech like a riled bobcat.

When I was nine, my sister was two years older and light years girlier. She wore wrap-around skirts, red hair bows and shiny pink nail polish.

I lived and breathed barefoot, wore ratty cut off jeans, baseball caps, and spent my time riding bikes, climbing trees or playing baseball.

Hence my big problem.

Since there were only the two of us kids under our roof, during long summer days when I wanted to go outside and jump on the pogo stick or snag a few grounders, there was no one but Cindy to play with. And she never wanted to face the heat, dirt, and bugs of a scorching Florida afternoon.

When begging and pleading didn't work, I resorted to goading her with the big ammo: "Fatty, fatty, two by four, can't get through the bathroom door ..."

The fact that Cindy was about as big around as a licorice stick never seemed to matter, for she was at the age that every girl thinks she's fat. And I quickly learned that the surefire way to get something I wanted was to goad her into it.

A goad, by definition, is a pointed rod used to urge animals forward. To prod. To prompt. To guide an entity from one place to another.

In Ecclesiastes 12:11, Solomon, a man gifted with wisdom directly from God, said this: "The words of the wise are like

goads" (NIV).

In other words, wise words can serve to prod, prompt, or guide an entity from one place to another. As in moving people from non-belief to belief; from agnosticism to theism; from an egocentric world view to a Christ-centered perspective.

This concept has weighed heavily on me this week as I prepare a eulogy for a dear Christian friend who passed away last weekend. The heaviness is not about my friend – although I miss her dreadfully, I have no doubt of her eternal security and that at this moment she's joyfully dancing an Irish jig in heaven's dance hall.

The heaviness is about my friend's brother, an intellectual Mensa know-it-all sort who views Christianity with disdain and spent the last evening of his sister's life on earth denouncing the "blatant weaknesses" and "contradictions" of the Bible to me right there in front of her as she lay on her deathbed. Painfully taking it all in.

I know his lostness distressed her, so it doubly distressed me, although I confess that I've often dismissed such arrogant, closed-minded, argumentative types as hopeless and shook off their dust from my sandals as I turned away.

But my friend had confided in me many times that she wanted more than anything to find a way to break through her brother's darkness with the light of Jesus.

And now she's gone. And I feel the weight of her unfulfilled burden. And I know that somehow, some day, there will be a way to reach him. Papa God is, after all, in the mind-changing business.

I ask myself: Do my words goad people in a Jesus-ward direction? Does my life prompt others to want to know the source of my inner joy? Do I actively seek to move people from one spiritual place to another?

Am I a godly goader?

As author Jill Briscoe so succinctly puts it, “Do our words ... prick their consciences? Move them from meaninglessness to meaningfulness? From nothingness to something-ness? From nonsense to God-sense?”

So I ask for your prayers this week, my friend. Please pray for Papa God to give me wise words to speak in this eulogy, meant expressly for someone who will never, ever darken the doors of a church. Not necessarily academically impressive, intellectually gifted words – for I have none. But words brimming with Jesus-joy that will break through this man’s intellectual defenses to prepare the way for the Holy Spirit to penetrate the darkness in his heart with a shaft of blinding light.

Not unlike what happened to another know-it-all guy named Saul on a road to Damascus.

Yep. A personal visit from Papa God is the best goad of all.

Debora M. Coty is the author of 10 books and is a newspaper columnist, orthopedic occupational therapist and tennis addict. Follow Debora on Twitter @deboracoty.