

Why America's Spiritual Fate Depends on Your Words

Where Does America Rank Today on the 'Hate-0-Meter'?

This past year, I've noted intriguing blue yard signs with white lettering popping up in front yards everywhere across the country. They say: "Hate Has No Home Here." It has forced me to ask: How much has hate found a "home" in America today?

As I listen to the language swirling around me from cable news channels, at office coolers, on talk radio, in political rallies, on a thousand YouTube diatribes, in editorial pages from the right and left, I wonder: Are the ways we talk to and about one another taking us toward healing or hostility? Toward the glory of Christ or the goading of countrymen?

What if we had a scientific tool that could gauge the level of hatred displayed in daily conversations and proclamations from coast to coast? If it measured all of the words spoken any given day in the public square, what would it tell us?

At one end of this unique meter, we'd find "hate," meaning: "I disdain you and want to dismiss you because I fear you and can't trust your approach or what you stand for." At the opposite end appears "love," meaning: "Even though I don't always agree with you, I care about you and affirm you as a person, and I want to understand you better so as to find ways we can join hands to work for the larger good." The meter's needle adjusts every day toward one side or the other, depending on the content of words it picks up.

At which end of the meter would America find itself in this hour? Would the dial suggest perhaps we're facing a crisis of social, moral, and spiritual jeopardy as a country?

Far more importantly for my fellow Jesus followers, where

today might the body of Christ in America find itself on this “Hate-0-Meter”? Is there growth in acidic language among us, inside our churches, particularly in the political arena? If so, how could that negatively impact the mission of Christ across our land?

Take a moment to carefully reflect on this before you answer—because words matter.

Words Matter More Than We May Think

Dr. Richard Friedman, professor of clinical psychiatry and director of the psychopharmacology clinic at Weill Cornell Medical College, observed last week in an article titled “The Neuroscience of Hate Speech”:

Humans are social creatures ... who are easily influenced by the rage that is everywhere these days. ... We know that repeated exposure to hate speech can increase prejudice ... It can also desensitize individuals to verbal aggression, in part because it normalizes what is usually socially condemned behavior. ... you don't have to be this unhinged to be moved to violence by incendiary rhetoric. Just about any of us could be susceptible under the right conditions.

Dr. Friedman proceeded to issue a grave warning about where our nation is headed in this regard—just based on our words. For him, the “Hate-0-Meter” regularly registers far too close toward a climate of “enmity that’s enveloping us as a people.”

Words matter. A lot.

Highly respected, conservative *Wall Street Journal* and *New York Times* columnist David Brooks spoke out the very same week about what he calls “the forces of division” that are warring against “the forces of connection”—primarily by our choice of words—and leading to what he calls “a new cold war.” Here’s how this astute cultural analyst put it:

It is as if we're witnessing this vast showdown between rippers and weavers. And here's the hard part of the war: It's not between one group of good people and another group of bad people. The war runs down the middle of every heart. Most of us are part of the problem we complain about (emphasis added).

The existential "cold war" America is experiencing—our heated war of words—"runs down the middle of every one of our hearts," Brooks claims. That sounds familiarly biblical, doesn't it?

Have we gone MAD? What I mean is this:

During the 20th-century's cold war with Russia, the ultimate defense for the U.S. was called "MAD" ("Mutually Assured Destruction"). It implied: "If you try to destroy us with nuclear missiles, we will do the same to you." Even so, there seems to be a social parallel to MAD in America these days. We say to one another: If you try to destroy me with your words, then I'll destroy you with mine." Is this where we currently find ourselves—mutually trying to destroy one another with words?

Words matter. Sometimes our use of words should terrify us because of where they lead. {eoa}

Stay tuned for Part 2!

To follow up on this blog post, download my free e-book, Messengers of Hope: Agents of Revival for the 21st Century, [here](#).