

Words That Pack Power

“The tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell” (James 3:5–6, NIV).

I don't think I have to convince you about the power words wield. When you think back to eventful moments in your life, there are likely words involved, either encouraging or discouraging. Those words had power. They perhaps changed your course. The tongue is a perfect illustration of the power of small. James makes the point that though the tongue is a small part of the body, it can set the course for a life. Words are amazing weapons or great healers.

Words have to be managed carefully. Once spoken, a word can't be unspoken. You can't inhale and pull it back in. Words take on a life of their own. All words are modeled after the eternal Word: living, active, sharp. If you let words fly in the heat of the moment, someone will have to heal from their impact. You can say, “I'm so sorry! I didn't mean that!” but the word is out and it lives in the person to whom you spoke it. No wonder the Word of God is jam-packed with warnings about using words prudently.

Words have the power to tear down, but they also have the power to build up. God can empower our words so that one small word can have so much impact that it redirects the trajectory of your life. God's work in our lives can be so deep that it changes our words. After all, words come right from the heart. Changed heart, changed words. We can be so much in His presence that we naturally speak His words. Jesus once said of His words, “These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me” (John 14:24).

I've always been accused of being exactly like my dad. People say that we are alike in looks, in temperament, in personality, in the way we process information and in how we communicate. My two sisters, when the three of us are together, will often react to some statement of mine by looking at each other, rolling their eyes and saying in unison, "That's Daddy talking."

They mean that I am expressing my own thoughts but that my own thoughts are exactly like my father's. If he were present, he'd have said exactly what I said. You might say I'm speaking my father's words. The thought is further illuminated in the book of Isaiah: "The Sovereign Lord has given me a well-instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being instructed" (Is. 50:4).

An instructed tongue. Not a wild, untamed tongue or a go-its-own-way tongue. We can have a trained, disciplined, controlled tongue. He wants you to speak words taught you by the Spirit. (See 1 Corinthians 2:13.) When you speak with an instructed tongue, what kind of power do your words have? They have the power to sustain the weary.

Words generated in my own wisdom can reach only as far as a person's intellect or feelings. Words that are taught by the Spirit reach deep into the person and touch the spirit: "Deep calls to deep" (Ps. 42:7). Spirit-generated words can touch the spirit because they are "explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words" (1 Cor. 2:13). These words are spiritual words because they were born of the Spirit. Everything that is born of the Spirit is spirit.

How do you learn the words that lift up the weary? "He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being instructed" (Is. 50:4). You learn by listening—listening carefully, attentively, like a student soaking up every word his mentor speaks. Respond to the Father's initiative. He

wakens you morning after morning and unstops your spiritual ears.

The Father wants to speak His healing, encouraging, strengthening, eternal, life-giving words through your mouth. He wants to instruct your tongue. When He sends His word out through you, He has already given that word an assignment. The astonishing power of His word will accomplish what He desires and purposes. (Read Isaiah 55:10–11.)

As you live moment by moment in His power and presence, He will speak His present-tense word through you: “The lips of the righteous nourish many” (Prov. 10:21). You will speak what you have heard from the Father. When you speak, it can be said of you, “That’s her Father talking.”

The Cumulative Power of Words

Words, once spoken, live on. Those words you speak to your teenager, thinking they are going in one ear and out the other? They are landing and making themselves a home. The words you thought you could throw out in a huff and apologize for later? They’ve carved out a nook and settled in. The words of kindness and encouragement that seemed to be ignored? They are fertilizing dreams.

Make it your goal to speak into lives such a preponderance of uplifting, encouraging words that they will eventually tip the balance and move a life from discouragement to hope.

Small Change

Look for every opportunity to speak a word that sustains the weary. Strangers, family, friends. Speak them or write them. Let the power of small loose in your world through your words.

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