

‘Watch Your Mouth’: The Power of Positive Speech

Occasionally, on Friday nights at our Shabbat meal, my family and I will play the following game. We start with one family member, and then each person at the table has to say his or her three favorite things about that person. Then we move on to the next person until everyone has been showered with loving and encouraging words.

It’s amazing to see our children glow after receiving their compliments and seeing how much joy kind words can bring. My husband and I don’t just want our children to experience how words can tear others down and hurt them; we also want them to understand how the power of speech can build up another person and make them happy.

We can learn much about the power of our words from the Torah portion, known as the parshah (listen to Episode 1 for more information about the ancient Jewish reading plan) that covers Leviticus 12-15. This is a double reading portion of the Torah, called Tazria-Metzora. Tazria means “conceived,” and Metzora means “diseased.” Interestingly enough, this portion of Leviticus, among other topics, deals with the skin-defiling disease known in Hebrew as *tzaraat*. We learn how a person was diagnosed with the disease and how that person was eventually cleansed and purified from this affliction by the priest.

In particular, we read in Leviticus 14:4, “the priest shall order that two live clean birds and some cedar wood and scarlet fabric and hyssop be brought for him who is to be cleansed.” The purification process involved bringing two clean birds to be brought to the priest—one that would be sacrificed and one that was ultimately set free.

So what, you may ask, does this process have to do with the

power of our words? God designated birds as part of this process because they are creatures that constantly chirp and chatter. According to Jewish tradition, the sin of the afflicted person was inappropriate speech, and so birds were symbolically appropriate for the sin at hand.

The bird that was sacrificed symbolized negative speech and the necessity to obliterate it from our lives. The second bird represented positive speech and was set free to demonstrate that positive words must permeate our lives. You see, it's not enough to refrain from saying hurtful things. We are also called to use the God-given gift of speech to bring goodness to the world.

Think of all the ways that we can use our speech for good. We can pray, share God's Word with others or speak God's praises. We can say, "I love you," and "thank you," more often. We can encourage others, compliment someone or ask how they are feeling.

When we focus on all the great things that we can say—and should say—every single day, we'll be so busy saying positive words that we won't even have time for negative speech!

For more on how the Lord can use your words to bless others, listen to *Nourish Your Biblical Roots* on the Charisma Podcast Network. {eoa}

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