

The Power of Words

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It's a bit embarrassing to admit, but I have always been a "talker." I'm sure I drove my family nuts when I was a little girl from the nonstop chatter. Inquisitive and nosy, I was interested in just about everything and everybody. I suppose those innate components of our personalities never change.

I was blessed immeasurably because my parents were brought up in the word of God and loved the Lord. They taught me by instruction, but also by word and deed. I remember many reminders, reprimands and outright scolding's for using harsh words. There were also a few paddling's when my stubborn nature couldn't or wouldn't "let it go."

As a teenager, I learned a lesson that haunts me even today. My best girlfriend at the time was also a big talker. We spent hours on the phone, endlessly discussing vital details of our self-indulgent world. This became problematic at my workplace and I was harshly reminded more than once that those calls were not permissible at work, particularly during our busiest hours.

When called to the phone one afternoon at just the wrong time, the glaring eyes of my boss watched every step. When my friend launched in, I interrupted in an irritated voice saying, "I've told you before, I don't have time to talk in the afternoons, so don't call again!"

To my humiliated dismay, she had a promising new customer on the phone with her who heard every ill-tempered word.

I still cringe over this mistake. However, it taught me a lesson my mom had tried for years to instill in me. Mom's teaching was biblical, and it serves as a reminder for us today.

As the 2020 pandemic persists, isolating us from those we love, people continue to protest over injustices, and the national presidential election is ramping up, it seems we're forgetting how to love our neighbors as ourselves. It seems our worst nature has overcome the very way we speak to and treat one another.

In this time of fear, unrest and outrage, we need to remember that our words matter. It's not just in what we say but in how the words are said. For me, the words of scripture provide sound instruction for how best to proceed during these turbulent times.

In the first chapter of James' letter in verse 19, *"You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger;"* And verse 1:26 clearly calls upon us to be mindful of our relationship with Christ, *"If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless."*

Our tongues are one of the most dangerous weapons we can use on others. Words have the power to build up and to tear down. James explains the power of our tongues in Chapter 3:

³ When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. ⁴ Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. ⁵ Likewise, 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. ⁶ The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.

King David was keenly aware of the power of the tongue when he shared in Proverbs 18: 1-8, and succinctly in verse 21: *The tongue has the power of life and death...*

We can do incredible damage when our tongue is in control and speaks before our minds engage. I learned a hurtful, shame-filled lesson that spring day long ago, and ultimately lost a friendship over it. Now, when I'm tempted to say ugly things when expressing my frustration over today's problems, I try to recall more of James' teaching in chapter 3:

⁹ With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. ¹⁰ Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. ¹¹ Can both fresh water and saltwater flow from the same spring?

In other words, if I claim to love the Lord and desire to be a light honoring him in a dark world, I must be mindful of the words I'm saying and the tone in which they are said.

Our nation is diverse and has prided itself on that diversity since its inception. Our forefathers fought for us to be free in our actions, beliefs and lifestyles. That freedom is precious to all of us who call America home. We are after all, one nation under God. Indivisible. With liberty and justice for all.

If we truly mean these words we proclaim as we stand solemnly before our flag with our right hand over our heart, then our words should reflect them.

Let us remember today and always to love the Lord with all our heart and love our neighbors as ourselves.

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For more of Bobbie's essays, visit her website at bobbiesmithbryant.com