

The Incredible Power of Words

Text: James 3:1-8 (NIV)

Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. ²We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check.

³When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. ⁴Or 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. ⁵Likewise, 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. ⁶The 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.

⁷All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind, ⁸but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

Introduction

President Calvin Coolidge was famously known as a man of few words. His nickname was “Silent Cal.” His wife, Grace Goodhue Coolidge, told the story of a young woman who sat next to her husband at a dinner party. She told Coolidge she had a bet with a friend that she could get at least three words of conversation from him. Without looking at her he quietly retorted, “You lose.” Coolidge understood very well the value of using only carefully considered words—and those being few in number.

In a time when people reveal their most personal information in the most public ways without thought or hesitation, it is important for us to recapture this piece of wisdom. Truly wise believers do not feel the need to tell everything they know to everyone they meet—much less to total strangers. Instead they choose their words with care, recognizing the responsibility that comes with our speech. Jesus said, *“But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned”* (Matthew 12:36–37).

With this in mind, let us consider a couple of *truths* drawn from our text concerning the words we speak.

I. The Words We Speak Hold Great Power for Good or Evil.

Illustration: 7 RESULTS OF USING POSITIVE WORDS

USING THE POWER OF THE TONGUE

By [Terrie Chappell](#)

Some of the most positive experiences of my life have rested on words of encouragement or help. Each time I benefit from the positive words of others, I'm more motivated than ever before to use my words in an uplifting way.

Notice these verses that tell us some of the positive influences our words can have:

1. POSITIVE WORDS GIVE INSTRUCTION AND WISDOM

My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother:—Proverbs 1:8

The mouth of the just bringeth forth wisdom: but the froward tongue shall be cut out.—Proverbs 10:31

The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright: but the mouth of fools poureth out foolishness.—Proverbs 15:2

The heart of the wise teacheth his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips.—Proverbs 16:23

2. POSITIVE WORDS GIVE DIRECTION

Hear counsel, and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end.—Proverbs 19:20

Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart: so doth the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel.—Proverbs 27:9

3. POSITIVE WORDS PRAISE THE LORD

I will bless the Lord at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth.—Psalm 34:1

O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise.—Psalm 51:15

4. POSITIVE WORDS ENCOURAGE OTHERS

A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.—Proverbs 25:11

A man hath joy by the answer of his mouth: and a word spoken in due season, how good is it!—Proverbs 15:23

The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary...—Isaiah 50:4

5. POSITIVE WORDS ARE PLEASANT AND APPROPRIATE

The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable: but the mouth of the wicked speaketh frowardness.—Proverbs 10:32

The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord: but the words of the pure are pleasant words.—Proverbs 15:26

Pleasant words are as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones.—Proverbs 16:24

She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness.—Proverbs 31:26

6. POSITIVE WORDS FACILITATE HEALING

The mouth of a righteous man is a well of life: but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked.—Proverbs 10:11

A wholesome tongue is a tree of life: but perverseness therein is a breach in the spirit.—Proverbs 15:4

There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword: but the tongue of the wise is health.—Proverbs 12:18

7. POSITIVE WORDS BRING SECURITY AND TRUTH

Have not I written to thee excellent things in counsels and knowledge, That I might make thee know the certainty of the words of truth; that thou mightest answer the words of truth to them that send unto thee?—Proverbs 22:20-21

This is the power of our tongue! If we will learn to choose our words carefully and wisely, we can positively invest in the lives of others—just with simple words.

This article is an excerpt from the book [The Choice Is Yours](#) available from [Striving Together Publications](#).

II. The Words We Speak Are Our Responsibility.

Illustration: Nails in the Fence

There was a little boy with a bad temper. His father gave him a bag of nails and told him that every time he lost his temper, to hammer a nail in the back fence. The first day the boy had driven 37 nails into the fence. Then it gradually dwindled down. He discovered it was easier to hold his temper than to drive those nails into the fence. Finally, the day came when the boy didn't lose his temper at all. He told his father about it and the father suggested that the boy now pull out one nail for each day that he was able to hold his temper.

The days passed and the young boy was finally able to tell his father that all the nails were gone. The father took his son by the hand and led him to the fence. He said, "You have done well, my son, but look at the holes in the fence. The fence will never be the same. When you say things in anger, they leave a scar just like this one. You can put a knife in a man and draw it out. It won't matter how many times you say 'I'm sorry', the wound is still there."

Alternate Application - gossip. When telling the story substitute "gossip" for "anger", but with the same result - the wounds are still there.

Source: unknown.

Conclusion

In 1675 a fire devastated London England. Nine years later Sir Christopher Wren laid a foundation stone in what would be his greatest architectural achievement -the building of St. Paul's Cathedral.

It took him thirty-five long years to complete his task, and when it was done he waited breathlessly for the reaction of her majesty, Queen Anne.

After being carefully shown through the structure, she summed up her feelings for the architecture in three words: "It is awful; it is amusing; it is artificial."

How you would feel if these words were used to describe the work of your life! But upon hearing these words from his Queen he heaved a sigh of relief and bowed gratefully before his queen.

How could this be? The explanation is simple: In 1710 the word awful meant "awe-inspiring," the word amusing meant "amazing," and the word artificial meant "artistic."

What to our ears might sound like a devastating criticism were in that time words of praise.

Quoted from The Desperate Preachers Website Lectionary Discussion of John 1:1-14