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# The Power of Our Words

## Introduction

1. I dare say that all of us have heard the old adage, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me."
2. Many, if not all of us also know that names and other things which people may say about us or to us do hurt.
3. With our words, we can build someone up or tear them down.

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4. Consider what Solomon had to say:
  - a. "Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit." (Proverbs 18:21, NASB95)
  - b. "Like a madman who throws firebrands, arrows and death, so is the man who deceives his neighbor, and says, "Was I not joking?"" (Proverbs 26:18–19, NASB95)

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- c. "Like apples of gold in settings of silver is a word spoken in right circumstances." (Proverbs 25:11, NASB95)
  - d. "By forbearance a ruler may be persuaded, and a soft tongue breaks the bone." (Proverbs 25:15, NASB95)
5. We don't always appreciate the power of words — our words affect everyone we speak to — absolutely everyone.
6. Our words have the power to help and heal, or to hurt and destroy.
7. Sadly, there are times when we pierce the souls of those around us.
8. We inflict emotional wounds on our spouses, our children, our neighbors, our co-workers, or anyone else who gets in our way.
9. In Ephesians 4:25-32 Paul penned an extended passage on the use of words.

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10. In verse 29, he summed up a number of good communication principles with these words:

“Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.”

12. In this verse, Paul places our words in two categories — unwholesome words and edifying words.
13. Tonight, I would for us to explore both categories:
- First, the unwholesome or destructive words which we need to eliminate from our vocabulary.
  - Second, those edifying or constructive words with which we can build other up.

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## **I. Destructive Words**

### **A. “UNWHOLESOME” WORDS**

- Means “decayed, rotten or diseased”
- Used of rotten fruit (Matthew 7:17-18) and diseased or decaying meat(Matthew 13:48).
- Unwholesome things are useless, worthless or unprofitable — fit for nothing but the trash heap.
- Most, if not all of us, know what happens when we put a rotten apple in a barrel with good apples — it corrupts the whole barrel.
- When Paul uses the word “unwholesome” in relation to our words, he is speaking of the way in which we damage others.
- Our unwholesome words tear down, destroy, offend and hurt others.

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8. What kind of words did Paul put in this category?
- Lying words (v. 25).

“Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.” (Ephesians 4:25, NASB95)

**b. In verse 31 we find a host of other unwholesome words:**

“Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.” (Ephesians 4:31, NASB95)

- 1) Have you ever been on the receiving end of someone’s bitterness or wrath?
- 2) If so, you know how sharp those words can be and the rage behind them.
- 3) I imagine that at least some of us have experienced those emotions which are the result of malicious words intended to hurt us.
- 4) Gossip accomplishes the same purpose. Such words injure people and relationships.

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**B. CUTTING WORDS**

**1. In Proverbs 12:18, Solomon spoke of words that pierce like a sword.**

“There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword . . .”(Proverbs 12:18a, NASB95)

**2. David experienced this on numerous occasions:**

**a. He spoke of his former friend Ahithophel, who had turned against,**

"His speech was smoother than butter, but his heart was war; his words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords." (Psalm 55:21)

**b. He spoke of people with swords in their lips and tongues.**

"My soul is among lions; I must lie among those who breathe forth fire, even the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows and their tongue a sharp sword." (Psalm 57:4)

**3. Such people are known for their sarcasm and the ability to put another down.**

- a. Their cutting remarks fly out of their mouth faster than you can respond.
- b. They do it to be funny, but fail to think about how much it hurts the

victim.

4. Such words can be especially detrimental to a marriage when a husband or wife speaks to his or her spouse in such a way.
5. Such wounds turn our spouses against us and lead to retaliation which on serves to further destroy the relationship.

[This leads us into another group of unwholesome words which Peter brings out in his first letter . . .]

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### E. VENGEFUL WORDS

1. Like cutting words, these unwholesome words also injure relationships (1 Peter 3:8-9).

"To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing." (1 Peter 3:8-9)

2. We generally respond to . . .
  - a. Angry accusations with angry accusations
  - b. Put-downs with put-downs
  - c. Sarcasm with sarcasm☐ Such is our human nature.
3. It is as the husband and wife.
  - a. "You never listen to me," she charges.
  - b. "That's because you never say anything worth listening to," he responds.
4. We tend to live by the adage, "When hurt, strike back and hurt in return."

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5. How does Peter teach us to respond? Notice what he says in the following verses:

"For, "The one who desires life, to love and see good days, must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit. He must turn away from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it." (1 Peter 3:10-11, NASB95)

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## II. Constructive Words

### A. PRINCIPLES TO CONSIDER

“Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.” (Ephesians 4:29, NASB95)

1. This one verse has some powerful biblical principles which can solve many of our communication problems.
2. If we use them we will find our relationships improving overnight.

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3. Ask yourself . . .
  - a. “Do my words edify — do they build up the people in my life rather than tear them down?”
  - b. Are these words what they need at this particular time?”
  - c. “Will these words bring grace to them — will they benefit in some way?”
4. Let’s consider some words that build.

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### B. GENTLE WORDS

1. Solomon wrote, “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (Proverbs 15:1).
2. The word gentle implies words that are tender, delicate and mild.
3. Paul said, “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you” (Ephesians 4:32).
4. The same tongue that stirs up strife can communicate kindness, a tender, compassionate heart and forgiveness when it is controlled by the Holy Spirit.
5. Gentle words can soothe and quiet the atmosphere after foolish words have been uttered.
6. When your anger flares and you find yourself making accusations or speaking in a way that is truly hurtful, ask God to change your heart.

7. Work to speak calmly in a way that does not attack the person with whom you are speaking.
8. In Proverbs 15:18, Solomon said, "A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but the slow to anger calms a dispute."
9. He also said, "a gentle answer turns away wrath" (Proverbs 15:1).

**Slide 12****C. UNDERSTANDING WORDS**

1. Before we can speak words which build others up according to their need, we need to understand those needs.
2. That would require some prayerful thought before we open our mouths.
3. Part of that prayerful thought asking God to help us determine exactly what the other person is feeling and trying to communicate to us.
4. Solomon said, "The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things." (Proverbs 15:28)
5. James wrote, "everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger" (James 1:19b, NASB9b).
6. Determining what the other person is feeling and trying to communicate requires that we listen and then ponder our response before speaking.

**Slide 13****D. APPRECIATIVE WORDS**

1. The apostle Paul gave us some examples of words that edify and benefit.
2. In many of his letters he included words of commendation and appreciation.

"I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now." (Philippians 1:3-5)

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"We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father," (1 Thessalonians 1:2-3)

3. Neither the Philippians nor the Thessalonians were perfect, but Paul praised them before he dealt with their problems.
4. There isn't one of us who is so confident and self-assured that we do not need a word of praise periodically.
5. Some of us tend to think that people will become proud if we compliment them too frequently.
6. The opposite is actually true — People often become boastful when they are starved for appreciation.
7. A sincere compliment will encourage them to do even better.
8. Psychologists tell us that, generally speaking, we need at least four positive statements to balance one word of criticism.
9. Delinquent children report getting approximately one to one.
10. Most of us are the same way — we enjoy cooperating with those who show us appreciation and we resist those who criticize us.
11. We can make a significant improvement in the way we get along with people we live and work with if we look for the positive things in their lives for which to show appreciation.
  - a. A husband might say, "That was a great meal. Thanks for the time and effort you put into it."
  - b. A deacon over education might say to a teacher, "Thanks for your faithfulness in class. I always know that you're going to be here unless you've notified me ahead of time."
12. Such statements communicate an important message — "I care about you. You're important to me. I value you highly." — they are constructive words that encourage and build.
13. This is not the false flattery which some people use to get their own way or obtain some favor in return.
14. The Scripture warns against that: "A flattering mouth works ruin" (Proverbs 26:28).
15. No, it encourages people when we sincerely commend the praiseworthy things we see in them.

## **Conclusion**

1. Let's all take the Word of God seriously and begin to weigh our words.
2. Get rid of those words which damage people and cause relationships to decay.
3. Replace them with words that build up, meet needs, and bring grace into the lives of those around us.
4. In the end we will be the ones who benefit as we experience God's blessing and the joy of harmonious relationships.