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# An Encouraging Word

## Introduction

1. There are many things which we as parents and grandparents seek to teach our children and grandchildren.
2. Those coming up behind us learn not only from what we verbally teach them, but also what we teach through our example.
3. If the things which we say to and about others is not considerate or helpful then our children will adopt those behaviors as well.
4. Our words have the power to help and heal, or hurt and destroy.

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7. Long ago King Solomon wrote about the power of our words:

“There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing” (*Proverbs 12:18*).

“Like apples of gold in settings of silver Is a word spoken in right circumstances.” (*Proverbs 25:11, NASB95*)

8. As Christians, our words and how we use them can accomplish great good or do much harm.
9. Tonight, I would like for us to look at something which the apostle Paul said to the Christians in Ephesus about our words.
10. In *Ephesians 4:25-32* he penned an extended passage on the use of words.

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11. In one verse, v. 29, he summed up a number of good communication principles:

“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 established two categories of communication — unwholesome words and edifying words.
13. The first he states should be eliminated from our daily speech.
14. We must do our best to replace our unwholesome words with edifying words.
15. In our lesson tonight, I would like for us to look at these two categories and the kinds of words included in each.
16. As we do this, let's each make it our goal to use more words which edify in our daily conversations.

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## I. Unwholesome Words

### A. WHAT DID PAUL MEAN?

1. "Unwholesome" (*sapros*) means "rotten, worthless or harmful"
2. Used of . . .
  - a. Rotten fruit (Matthew 7:17-18)

"So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit.

"A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit." (Matthew 7:17–18, NASB95)

- b. Rotten or degenerate fish (**Matthew 13:48**)
  - 1) In Matthew 13:47-50, Jesus told the parable of the "dragnet cast into the sea, gathering fish of every kind" (v. 47)
  - 2) In verse 48, Jesus said of the dragnet, "and when it was filled, they drew it up on the beach; and they sat down and gathered the good fish into containers, but the bad they threw away." (Matthew 13:48,

NASB95)

3. Things which are unwholesome useless, worthless or unprofitable — fit for nothing but the trash heap.
4. Even worse, when we put a rotten apple in a barrel with good apples, it corrupts the whole barrel.
5. When Paul commands us to avoid “unwholesome” words, he is telling us to avoid those words which are worthless, which tear down, destroy, offend and hurt those around us.

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8. What kind of words did Paul put in this category?
  - a. “laying aside all falsehood” (v. 25) — words which perpetrate a lie.
  - b. “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice” (v. 31) — Bitter words, angry words, malicious words, gossiping words
9. In addition to such words let’s consider some others which injure people and relationships.

**Slide 6****B. PIERCING WORDS**

1. As we have already seen, Solomon spoke of words that pierce like a sword (*Proverbs 12:18*).

“There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing” (*Proverbs 12:18*).
2. David struggled with those people whose tongues cut him — he mentions it several times in the Psalms.
  - a. He spoke of his former friend Ahithophel, who had turned against, saying,

“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*)

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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)

"Behold, they belch forth with their mouth; swords are in their lips, for, they say, "Who hears?" (Psalm 59:7)

"Who have sharpened their tongue like a sword. They aimed bitter speech as their arrow," (Psalm 64:3)

3. I think we have all known people endowed with sharp tongues.

- a. They have the gift of sarcasm.
- b. They are masters of the put down.
- c. They have quick minds which shoot out razor-sharp words faster than most people can respond to them.
- d. They do it to be funny, but fail to think about how much it hurts the person who is the target of their sarcasm.
- e. Their verbal assaults hint of the foolish talking or jesting which Paul condemned in Ephesians 5:4.

"and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks." (Ephesians 5:4, NASB95)

4. Some husbands and wives take advantage of social gatherings to cut down their spouses.

- a. Instead of bringing the matter up in private and talking through their issues, they find it easier to drop little razor blades into the conversation when their spouses cannot fight back.
- b. The result of such attacks are additional wounds which arouse hostility, lead to retaliation, and result in further decay of the relationship.

**Slide 8****C. NAGGING WORDS**

1. The book of Proverbs has a good bit to say about nagging and its effect:

"It is better to live in a corner of a roof than in a house shared with a contentious woman." (*Proverbs 21:9*)

"It is better to live in a desert land than with a contentious and vexing woman." (*Proverbs 21:19*)

"A constant dripping on a day of steady rain and a contentious woman are alike;" (*Proverbs 27:15*)

2. There is a difference between nagging and reminding.

a. A reminder is friendly and free from impatience or irritation.

b. Nagging is a repeated, critical request marked by exasperation and anger.

c. It is what Solomon labeled as "contentious."

3. A person who nags has a tendency to scold, lay blame, make insinuations or accusations that strike at a person's self-esteem.

a. "*When are you ever going to paint the house? Don't you care what people think?*" — an attempt to create guilt.

b. "*Don't you know any better than to slurp your soup? You eat like an animal.*" — an attempt to shame

4. Men can be just as guilty as wives.

a. "I wish you'd lose some weight. I'm ashamed to be seen in public with you." — such words are critical, humiliating and insulting — they hurt and destroy

b. "I've told you a hundred times that I don't like my coffee this strong" — humiliation

5. Nagging words like these are destructive.

a. They irritate like the continual drip of a leaky faucet.

b. They hurt by making other people feel badly.

6. Such words heap guilt on people, causing them to think less of themselves, chipping away at their self-esteem.

**Slide 9****D. EXAGGERATED WORDS**

1. Other words that destroy relationships are exaggerated generalizations which take the form of absolute statements.
2. Perhaps at one time or another you have said to someone you love, "You never" do this or that or "You always" do this or that."
3. Absolute statements are seldom true and they tend to arouse antagonism in us.
4. How do we respond when we are the recipient of such statements?
5. Instead of trying to discover the real problem which prompted the statement, we work to prove the statement wrong..

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## **E. VENGEFUL WORDS**

1. Peter identified some unwholesome words that 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. We tend to live by the adage, "When hurt, strike back and hurt in return."
- 4. Instead, Peter calls upon us to respond as our Lord responded,

"And while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously" (1 Peter 2:23).

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## **II. Edifying Words**

## A. POWERFUL BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES

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.
3. Ask yourself . . .
  - a. "Do my words edify — do they build 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 edify.

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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, tenderheartedness and forgiveness when it is controlled by the Holy Spirit.
5. Gentle words have the ability to soothe and quiet the atmosphere after foolish words have been uttered.
6. When passions rage, accusations are made or unkindnesses hurled, try gentle words.
7. Do your best to speak in calm, quiet, kind tones.
8. Choose words that are non-threatening and non-retaliatory.
9. It will be like pouring cold water on burning coals.

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**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. It is too easy to say the first thing that comes to our minds.
4. Solomon, however, wrote . . .

"Do you see a man who is hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him." (*Proverbs 29:20*)

"The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things." (*Proverbs 15:28*)

5. Part of that prayerful thought will be an effort to determine exactly what the other person is feeling and trying to communicate to us.
6. To some extent we all struggle to say exactly what we feel and what we want.
7. This should make us want to be more patient with others when they are not communicating properly and try to grasp what is behind their words.
8. Then we can respond with understanding words rather than vengeful words.
9. Understanding words build up and encourage.

**Slide 14****D. APPRECIATIVE WORDS**

1. The apostle Paul at using words which 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*)

"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. All of us need words of praise from time to time.
5. We may think that a person will become proud if we compliment him or her too frequently.
6. Actually, the opposite is true — People tend to 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. I think most of us here tonight 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. No, it encourages people when we sincerely commend the praiseworthy things we see in them.

## Conclusion

1. I want to go back to a passage I shared with you at the beginning of this lesson:

“Like apples of gold in settings of silver Is a word spoken in right circumstances.” (*Proverbs 25:11, NASB95*)
2. Let’s all work to remove from our vocabulary those words which damage those around us and cause our relationships to decay.
3. Replace them with words that build up, meet needs, and bring grace into people’s lives.
4. In the end we will find that we ourselves are the ones who benefit as God blesses this congregation with those Christian relationships which bring glory to His name.