

Words Matter

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Day One

What is your heart full of? We are examining why our words matter; and why what we say is important as followers of Jesus.

In Luke 6:43-45, Jesus shows what our words expose when he says,

No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its fruit. People do not pick figs from thorn bushes, or grapes from briars. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of (Luke 6:43-45).

Jesus is explaining how we can judge a person's character. Much like if we were to look at a tree or plant to tell if it is a "good" tree or not, our words show the fruit of our hearts.

What does the fruit of your words reveal about the condition of your heart? If you were to take inventory of the conversations and comments that flow from your tongue on a regular basis, what would you notice? When you are at the office, what pours forth from your lips, out loud, or utterances under your breath? When you are at home with your spouse, your kids, or your roommate or interacting with a stranger, what do your words display?

We can learn a lot when we pay attention to the words that come out of our mouth. If you find your words are harsh, impatient, laced with anger, self-defeating or deflating, or derogatory toward others, it's time to examine your heart. Your words reveal what your heart feels and what's inside you. Your words can be the indicator light that something in your heart needs the healing touch of God.

Your heavenly Father wants to minister to the corners of your heart that are producing bad fruit—the places that are angry, bitter, wounded, weary, or hardened. Hear me when I say we all struggle with our words. Different circumstances, seasons, or people will provoke the depths of our soul to surface through our speech. When you stop long enough to observe your words and get curious about where they're coming from you can get yourself off autopilot and intentionally invite God to search you and help you.

One of my favorite prayers comes from Psalm 19:14,

*May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart
be pleasing in your sight,
Lord, my rock and my redeemer (Psalm 19:14).*

As Christians, our hearts have been and are continually being changed by the power of God. And that change is reflected in our words.

Day Two

What is your self-talk? We are examining why our words matter. Let's look at the words we speak to ourselves about ourselves.

Stop and think about it. What are the words you find yourself saying to yourself? Your self-talk is the ongoing conversation you have with yourself in your mind. Negative self-talk includes thoughts such as, "I'm worthless," "I'll never be good enough," "I just can't seem to get it right," or "I'm so stupid," as well as thoughts about your circumstances, "I'll be stuck in this job forever" or "Things will never get better."

We all hold these kinds of ongoing conversations with ourselves, and although you might not always be aware of it, your internal conversations have a significant impact on your mood, your behaviors, and ultimately your life. Sometimes we entertain negative thoughts because of what others have said to us.

We've been called stupid, ugly, worthless, or worse—and when we hit a low point in our lives, these are the very words we hear on repeat in our minds. Like a hamster wheel, many of us get caught up in negative self-talk. Your words matter not only for you and your life but the words you speak to yourself also matter to God. The latest brain research shows that negative language actually releases thousands of stress-producing hormones and neurotransmitters in our brains, powerfully affecting our moods, making us feel worse and ultimately, they result in acting in ways that justify our false beliefs.

This is no surprise to God, our great creator who designed our brains, and his Word shows us the power of guiding our thoughts. Ephesians 4:23 tells us *to be made new in the attitude of your minds*. And Romans 12:2 says, *do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind*.

The enemy wants nothing more than to infiltrate your thoughts with lies. You must fight back with God's Word and speak the truth to yourself, even when, or especially when, you don't feel like it. This is more than positive self-talk; this is the Holy Spirit-powered truth.

Begin to examine your defeating thoughts. What fears or false beliefs have become a stronghold in your life? What words do you dwell on and do you pummel yourself with? Ask yourself, "Are these thoughts in alignment with God?" If the thoughts are negative or in any way shaming or condemning, you know for certain the answer is "no." Getting unstuck from old patterns of thinking will take effort on your part because thoughts become habits and habits can be hard to break. But you can choose the thoughts you entertain about yourself, and as you do, remember to ask God to help you.

Day Three

Do your words betray, or do they build up? We are taking a close look at our words, and why what we say matters. Now, I know we are aware that the words coming out of our mouths have an impact, and we also know as followers of Jesus, we are held to an even higher holy standard. Yet, minding our mouths can be a challenge. We don't always think before we speak. This is a friendly reminder to make sure you train and discipline yourself to choose your words wisely.

One way to filter your words is through the lens of motive. What I mean is this. What are you trying to accomplish with your words? What is your intent? Is it positive or potentially destructive? I was reading the Gospel of Luke the other day. When I came to the account of Judas betraying Jesus, verse 4 stood out to me.

And Judas went to the chief of priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus (Luke 22:4).

Judas used his words to backstab and be disloyal to Jesus and Judas' words ultimately caused death.

The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit (Proverbs 18:21).

You will reap the fruit of your words whether they are life-giving or life-taking. In the hustle and bustle of our work environments, it's easy to underestimate the impact of our words. We often focus on tasks, deadlines, and goals, forgetting our words hold immense power. Negative words can bring death to morale, creativity, and productivity. Gossip, criticism, and complaining can create division and hinder progress. When we speak positive and encouraging words and are loyal to the absent, meaning we are not talking behind people's backs, we breathe life into our colleagues and our workplace. Your words have the potential to build strong relationships, foster teamwork, and create a culture of trust and respect.

The words you speak not only give life or death to others, but they also create your legacy. As we read the New Testament, Judas's legacy was one of betrayer. How would you like your name to be in a book that billions of people will read with that type of reputation? Not me! The point is this, people will remember the words you say, and those words impact your reputation. What will people say about your character when they remember you? Let's choose to build people up and remember to use our words wisely.

Day Four

Have your words ever gotten you in hot water? We have been examining why our words matter and I want to turn our attention to a powerful piece of wisdom from Proverbs.

Those who guard their mouths and their tongues keep themselves from calamity (Proverbs 21:23).

Now we can acknowledge this is practical advice for everyday living, right? Yet if we are honest, we can blow by these pearls of wisdom and be careless with our words.

When have your words gotten you into trouble? Maybe it was something you said about a co-worker or friend, and it got back to them. Or maybe it was an inappropriate outburst of disapproval in a meeting. In our daily lives we all encounter situations that test our patience, tempt us to react impulsively, and speak without considering the consequences. However, Proverbs is a clear warning to be intentional about guarding our mouths and tongues, reminding us that exercising restraint leads to positive outcomes.

When you refrain from speaking words that can cause harm such as gossip, lies, or hurtful remarks, you are kept from unnecessary trouble and distress. Remember that once words are spoken, they cannot be taken back, and they can have lingering impact. When you are mindful of what you say, you will minimize conflicts and misunderstandings.

Guarding our tongues goes beyond verbal communication. Social media posts, texts, and instant messages can greatly influence how other people perceive us. Use discretion and integrity in all forms of communication. Filter your words through Ephesians 4:29 which says,

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen (Ephesians 4:29).

Exercising self-control with your words will lead to a life protected from unnecessary troubles and conflicts. Using wisdom will keep you from saying something that grieves God and from situations you will later regret. By choosing your words carefully and speaking with kindness you honor God and make a positive contribution to the well-being of those around you.

When you do mess up with your words, quickly own it. Don't make excuses, admit your mishap. Humbly ask for forgiveness.

Instead of lashing out, lavish people with life-giving words. Make every effort to guard your mouth so you can keep a clear conscience and be free from needless quarrels.

Day Five

We have been examining why our words matter, and we'll wrap up with the power of an apology—how admitting our faults and taking ownership of our misgivings is a worthwhile way to use our words.

The power of an apology is a profound aspect of Christian living. It takes courage and maturity to acknowledge your mistakes, take responsibility for your actions, and seek forgiveness. When you apologize sincerely, you demonstrate humility. In a world where people are quick to point fingers and place blame, admitting guilt will separate you from the crowd. After all, as a follower of Jesus, you are meant to live a life set apart from the practices of the culture around you, and instead conduct yourself with Christlike character.

Who is someone you need to apologize to? Who needs to hear you say the words, "I was wrong." I know you may feel a lump in your throat or even have an allergic reaction to those words. We sometimes falsely believe admitting a mistake shows a sign of weakness or will in some weird way give others power over us. But that is not true. Listen, saying you were wrong is not a sign of weakness; it's a sign of strength. An apology has the power to mend broken relationships and restore trust. It can open the door to meaningful conversations and opportunities for growth.

It's important to note that when you humble yourself and offer a heartfelt apology, you are not only saying you are sorry, but you are also demonstrating regret and your commitment to make a conscious effort to change your behavior. If you apologize and then neglect to change, you will lose credibility fast, and your future words of remorse will be rendered meaningless. A flippant apology adds insult to injury. We need to be truly sorry for our actions or words. It is important you do not offer excuses for your actions, and you are specific in your apology. If you lost your temper with someone and said hurtful words, it might sound something like this: "I am sorry for losing my temper today and saying things I should not have said. I realize my words were hurtful, and that is not the kind of person I want to be."

Now, you may be trying to get off the hook and be thinking of all of the reasons the other person is wrong. But this is not about them, this is about you and the part you played in causing hurt or conflict. Fessing up to your mistakes is a function of your integrity. You're admitting that you are not the person you want to be, and you are a work in progress. As Romans 3:23 says, *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*. Who will you apologize to today?