

# Word Fast for the New Year Series

*Isaiah 58:6 (NIV)*

*<sup>6</sup> "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?"*

*Isaiah 58:9-10 (NIV)*

*<sup>9</sup> Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. "If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk,*

*<sup>10</sup> and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.*

Most of us understand the power of spoken words, but it is likely uncharted territory for us to consider the power of *fasting* words, or not speaking specific words. How could this be so powerful? Scripture tells us very pointedly, "We all err in many ways. But if any man does not err in word, he is a perfect man and able also to control the whole body" (James 3:2, MEV). There are some fiercely unruly members in our bodies, but God's Word says that if we tame our words, we can tame our bodies and minds. That's powerful!

Can you visualize the impact on your life if you could bridle your thoughts and body? It is God's very intention for us to destroy strongholds of poor self-image, negative speculations, and every thought that is contrary to who we are in Christ. These negative words keep us chained to the past and bar us from moving into God's purposes for our future. The words that come out of our mouths heal or hurt. They bring reconciliation or division. By our words, men are called into their destiny and the life of the Lord is shared with others. By words, dreams are shattered.

These words are **Complaining, Criticism, Judgment, Sarcasm, Gossip, and Negativity**.

So let's dive into these words and see what the Lord wants to do in our hearts.

## **Part 1**

### **Complaining**

Why is complaining such a big deal? After all, we all complain about something. Here is what we don't get. In the act of complaining, we create an atmosphere, an air around us, that cannot host the presence of the Lord. Grumbling, murmuring, whining—whatever synonym you want to ascribe to complaining – they all have the same effect. They quench the Spirit of the Lord.

It is critically important for us to recognize that complaining has its root and beginning in ingratitude. Ingratitude is not just some trivial, passing attitude. Rather, it is a serious heart issue that has major consequences in our lives.

You see, the very nature of God is goodness.

*Exodus 33:19 (NIV)*

*<sup>19</sup> And the LORD said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.*

This is why complaining is so damaging to our spiritual life and relationships. The words we speak answer this question: Do we really believe God is good? When we complain - we are saying, "God, I really don't believe

You are good. I don't believe You have it under control." And, as for those around us, I say complaining is like emotional pollution; it pollutes the air they breathe. Complaining sends an emotional virus into the air that others breathe and become infected with.

When we complain, we blind ourselves to all the good things the Lord has accomplished for us. By complaining, we disavow all of God's past provision and His hopes and promises for the future. Complaining measures all of God's promises to us and finds them wanting because of one immediate situation of need we might have.

So how do you overcome complaining? Focus on the many good things the Lord has provided. Instead of grumbling and complaining, we are to praise God for His goodness to us.

Gratefulness, thanksgiving, and praise to God for who He is and what He has done for us - all of these expressions - send the right message to God that resonates with His spirit. These are the words that should continually be on our lips. How do you overcome evil? With good. There is always good somewhere, and no matter how dark the day seems, God is able to show His love, compassion, and care for us in many ways. We simply have to be on the lookout for it.

Ask the Holy Spirit to sensitize you to your own heart and listen carefully for the words coming out of it, in particular, words of complaint.

## Criticism

The enemy is always out to destroy God's essential purpose; that purpose is for believers to be in unity. Here is where the enemy is most effective in derailing God's purposes. He is out to create division in our fellowship with other believers, our families, friends, and working relationships.

The greatest danger to unity? Criticism. And the most insidious danger to unity and fellowship is secret criticism - criticism hidden in the recess of the heart and not spoken.

Our fellowship with one another is based on trust. Criticism, even secret criticism, destroys the trust. Because we are spiritual beings and the ways of the spirit operate in the unseen, secret criticism is every bit as destructive as openly critical words. When there is secret criticism of the heart in operation in our Christian fellowship, it hinders honesty and authenticity. We don't know what's wrong, but something just doesn't feel right. Ever have those feelings?

Some Christians mistakenly assume their ability to tear apart a person, suggestion, program, or idea as discernment. But contrary to popular assumption, criticism is not one of the nine gifts of the Holy Spirit. The Lord gives us discernment to pray.

If we speak personal words of concern to another brother or sister about them, it is important those words exhort them. The word used in the New Testament for exhortation is *paraklēsis*, and it means to entreat or encourage. An exhortation is meant to be an intimate call that comes to encourage, inspire, and motivate the other person in their pursuit of God. If we can't encourage another believer in this manner, then perhaps what we really need to do is simply be silent and repent.

I believe we dramatically underestimate the power of negative words, especially when it comes to criticism. But Scripture is quite clear about the power of these words, teaching us they are devastating to our spirit.

**Proverbs 15:14 (NLT)**

***14 A wise person is hungry for knowledge, while the fool feeds on trash.***

So who would purposefully choose to be a critical person? It means you can never relax and enjoy anything. You're always on the lookout to find fault in whatever is happening around you at any given moment. You look for the worst and miss the best. What's more, it makes you and everyone around you miserable. No one likes to be around a faultfinder, a person who is critical about everything.

If we develop a habitual critical view of life, we always respond the same way when presented with any opportunity, problem, challenge, or new relationship. We respond with a quick evaluation and synopsis of what can go wrong. It becomes second nature to criticize and find fault; it comes as effortlessly as breathing. Speaking of which, I will never forget an incident when all of my managers were gathered for a crucial presentation given by a seasoned consulting group. Their credentials and experience were impressive. They had proven success in addressing the serious issues we were facing. But following their recommendations, one of my key people responded with his normal critical assessment: "It will not work here."

How does one become a critical person? For many of us, difficult life experiences as a child or young adult can easily cast us in the role of victim. We feel sorry for ourselves, pity ourselves, and begin the descent into the only role where we think we can get ahead of others: the critic.

The worst part of being critical is that we make authority figures the target of our foulest criticism. The level of criticism levied at figures of authority is disgraceful, and Christians don't seem to comprehend the damage done when they act like the world with criticism and negative comments. No one is immune to the blasts of criticism, from our pastor to the president; we are often unrelenting.

There is only one appropriate response in coming to the recognition that you are being critical or have criticism in your heart toward another person. That response is to confess the criticism for what it is: sin. Confessing my sin of criticism and judgment to another person is humbling and, most important, freeing.

Fasting words has taught me that the most effective way to deal with my thoughts of criticism is to be silent. Before we ever blurt out a single word of judgment or criticism about a brother or sister, we should take those words to the foot of the cross and allow Jesus to shoulder our sin. He is able. We must repeatedly ask ourselves, "Are these words really beneficial? Will they edify?" If we practice holding our critical words toward other Christians, we will come into great freedom - a freedom from criticizing and judging - and instead we will have spiritual eyes to see the other person as a unique creation made in our Lord's image.

***Proverbs 18:21 (NIV)***

***<sup>21</sup> The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.***

***Psalms 34:1 (NIV)***

***<sup>1</sup> I will extol the LORD at all times; his praise will always be on my lips.***

## **Part 2**