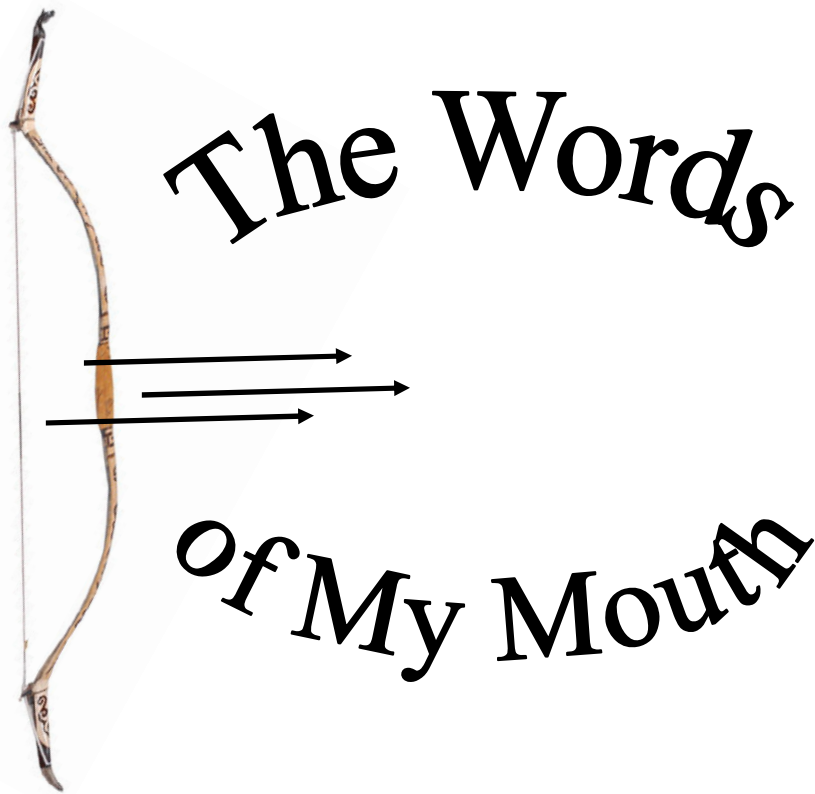


Bethany Baptist Church
112-17 148th Street, Jamaica, NY 11435
718-529-5842

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.... I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints. Jude 1:3 (NIV)

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Reviewed by: Dr. Lambert Duncan

The Words of My Mouth

Psalm 64:3 (NIV), *“They sharpen their tongues like swords and aim their words like deadly arrows”*

Psalm 19:14 (NIV), *“May the words of my mouth and the mediation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.”*

Colossians 4:6 (NIV), *“Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.”*

There is an old religious saying that compares our words to an arrow. A wise man trying to understand the saying asked a religious leader, *“Why are words compared to an arrow and not another weapon, like a sword for example?”* The religious leader responded: *“Because if a man unsheathes his sword to kill his friend, and his friend pleads with him and begs for mercy, he may return his sword to its scabbard without doing any harm to him. However, an arrow, once it is shot, cannot be returned, no matter how much one wants it to be returned. Our words are exactly the same as an arrow; once said, we cannot take them back, they are forever in the minds of their hearers.”*

Most of us fail to realize how damaging our words can be to our hearers. In fact, unless you, or someone dear to you have been the victim of terrible physical violence that left life long scars, my guess is, the worst pains you’ve suffered have probably come from careless words. That is, words used cruelly to criticize, humiliate, ego crush, spread rumors, and gossip. Even some of the *“nicknames”* we give to our loved ones, although we don’t mean any harm, are hurtful and destructive to the individual.

The truth is most people will spend more time in the grocery store selecting their fruit than they will to select their words. The next time you go into a grocery store or wherever it is you go to buy your fruit and vegetables, pay attention to the amount of time you spend selecting them. Then in your next conversation, compare that time to the amount of time you spend selecting your words, you will be surprised to see how little time is spent selecting your words.

Unbeknownst to most, our words have untold power to either build one another up or tear one another down. We can build each other up with words of encouragement that are much needed in this complex world we live in. A simple *“You’re doing a great job!”* from our mouths can lift the human spirit in ways you cannot imagine. Sometimes our words of encouragement come just in time to keep someone from either giving up or doing something they will later regret. Not only that, the average wife can, by using kind words of encouragement, instead of harsh words of criticism, get her husband to do almost anything she wants. The same holds true for wives, a wife will respond better to her husband’s requests if he uses words of encouragement

instead of harsh, condescending words. As a general rule, friends, relatives, employees, our children or anyone we are in contact with will be much more cooperative and helpful to us if we are more careful with our choice of words when soliciting their services, giving them assignments or much needed correction.

However, we tear one another down in at least three (3) ways with the words from our mouths that we can't take back once they are uttered. Consider the following:

1. **Slander** – I read a story about a man that went through a community slandering a Rabbi. One day, the man thought about his actions and felt bad about what he had said about the Rabbi. Realizing what he had done was wrong, the man went to the Rabbi and begged him for forgiveness and offered to do whatever the Rabbi wanted him to do to make amends. The Rabbi said, *“Ok, here’s what I’d like you to do. Go home and get a feather pillow, cut it open, then scatter the feathers to the wind, then come back and see me.”* The man did as the Rabbi asked, then came back to the Rabbi and asked, *“Am I now forgiven for what I’ve done?”*

“Almost”, said the Rabbi, *“You have to do just one more thing.”* *“Sure,”* the man said, *“What is it?”* The Rabbi said, *“Go and gather up all the feathers you scattered to the wind and bring them to me.”* *“That’s impossible,”* the man said. *“The winds have already scattered the feathers.”* *“Precisely,”* the Rabbi said. *“And although you truly wish to correct the evil you have done, it is just as impossible to repair the damage done by your words as it is to recover the scattered feathers.”*

2. **Public Humiliation** – A fifteen year old high school student was enrolled in a writing class. His first assignment was to write an essay. When he finished writing his essay, he had to read it aloud in front of the entire writing class. He read about a quarter of what he wrote to his class before the teacher stopped him. The words that came from the teacher’s mouth need not be repeated, let’s just say the teacher used a barnyard term to describe his writing. Needless to say, the other students laughed at him and he went to his seat in bitter shame. Years later, this 15 year old high school student became the successful author and editor of some 470 books, and regarded by many as one of America’s premier intellects. However, 55 years later at the age of 70, this author lay terminally ill in his bed writing his memoirs. In his memoirs he wrote, referring to this teacher that publically humiliated him when he was 15, *“I hate very few people, but I hate him.”* Although many years had passed since this student was publicly humiliated by his teacher, he never forgot it, it hurt him up until the time he closed his eyes for the final time.

I admit, there are times when correction or constructive criticism is needed. However, our words should be chosen carefully and we should avoid, if possible, correcting others publicly to humiliate them in front of others. There is usually nothing to gain by publicly humiliating someone.

3. **Name Calling / Condescending Remarks** – From our childhood, most of us are familiar with the old saying “*Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me.*” Many mothers have tried to comfort their child with these words after he/she had been subjected to name calling in school or elsewhere. Although these mothers meant well, the truth is, this saying (“*Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me.*”) is far from the truth. If we are honest with ourselves, most of us, who are now adults, are still feeling the effects of the cruel nicknames and the condescending remarks made by some mean kids we went to school with. Sadly, some of the cruel nicknames and condescending words that hurt us the most came from our parents and relatives. The occasional “*you’re stupid*” or “*you’re not worth a dime,*” along with a nickname based on a part of the body that may be different from everyone else, has caused many adults to frequent a shrink’s office. In fact, while I can hardly take the summer heat, I’ve noticed that many people wear jackets or sweaters in the middle of the summer. Later I found out that they do this not because they are cold, but because of some cruel nickname or hurtful remark made about their appearance or weight.

In closing, the power of our words, positive or negative, cannot be overstated. Consider the last novel you read, especially one about an unusual hardship case or the terminally ill person. In either case, we usually began to feel the pain of the character in the novel. Sometimes we are even reduced to tears because of the characters pain or circumstances. However, we don’t even know the character in the novel. In fact, most if not all of the characters we read about in novels are fictitious. Yet, the power of the words used by the author in that novel will begin to stir us up emotionally, sometimes, even to the point of tears.

So the next time we converse with our brothers and sisters in Christ, our biological family, our friends and relatives, or those we are in contact with, let’s be more careful with our choice of words. Our words can resolve problems or create problems, make our lives easy or make our lives more difficult, it’s our choice. Perhaps one of the best ways to become more careful with our words is to think of them as a loaded gun. Most of us would not be so careless as to go around pointing a loaded gun at folks for fear of it going off and killing them. Finally, keep in mind the words of the psalmist (**Psalm 19:14**) “*May the words of my mouth and the mediation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O’ Lord, my rock and my redeemer.*”

God Bless,
Pastor D. M. Duncan

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