

# Word Fast for the New Year Series

## *Proverbs 6:16-19 (NLT)*

*<sup>16</sup> There are six things the LORD hates— no, seven things he detests:*

*<sup>17</sup> haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that kill the innocent,*

*<sup>18</sup> a heart that plots evil, feet that race to do wrong,*

*<sup>19</sup> a false witness who pours out lies, a person who sows discord in a family.*

## *John 17:22-23 (NLT)*

*<sup>22</sup> “I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one.*

*<sup>23</sup> I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me.*

At some point in our Christian walk we may have fasted from food, television, or other things in order to refocus and rekindle our relationship with Christ. Fasting may even be a frequent part of our prayer life. But have you ever fasted from words? The truth is that even if we consider ourselves to be a positive person, we still use damaging words that plague our life and rob us of the spiritual growth we desire.

## **Change your words. Change your life.**

*This new year let's focus on several biblically sound mechanisms to help us change our words and our lives. Not only will our vocabulary change, our heart also will be transformed. “For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matt. 12:34 nkjv). With this guaranteed effective form of fasting we will be challenged to eradicate from our speech all words of...*

- Judgment
- Criticism or sarcasm
- Negativity
- Complaining
- Gossip

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

## **Part 3: Gossip, Negativity**

### **Gossip**

There are few words in our English language that conjure a spectrum of emotions as much as the word *gossip*. Just hearing it can provoke anger, fear, rage, embarrassment, and sorrow, to name just some of the obvious. We feel anger when we see the impact of it; fear that it could happen to us; rage when it does happen to us; embarrassment when we hear it used to broadcast a friend's failure to others; and sorrow when we see the damage it does to an innocent person.

No one is immune to gossip. And it is not limited to figures of notoriety. We hear words of gossip about our children's teachers at school, our friends, members of our church, and even our pastors.

The words of a gossip are the wickedest of all words. Why? Gossiping carries great negative, destructive power. It does more damage that lasts longer and spreads further than other negative words. Gossip creates its own life, gaining momentum, expanding in influence as it broadcasts among people, with each person adding their negative spin to it. One act of gossip can tarnish or ruin a person's lifelong, hard-earned, good reputation. A gossipy remark can decimate someone's self-image and self-confidence. Gossip can lead to alienation, depression, and the loss of lifelong friends. It can destroy a pastor, his ministry, and his church.

I believe we can comprehend the depth and scope of gossip only through spiritual understanding. How important is it for us to understand gossip, not participate in it, and guard ourselves against it? Proverbs 6:16-19 lists six things the Lord hates and a seventh that is an abomination to him. What is that seventh? One who sows discord among brothers. Wow!

Why is gossip such a particularly grievous sin? Unity was Jesus's repeated prayer to the Father in John 17:22-23. Unity among believers is what Christ believed would draw people to Him. Like no other words, gossip separates and destroys unity.

While we would all agree that gossip is strongly spoken against in the Scriptures, most of us still find it challenging to not listen to, spread, or sometimes even start gossip. Gossip is subtle, enticing, and addictive, and it can easily snare a person. We can be caught participating in it—from spreading simple rumors to entering the dark depths of slander.

The question you have to ask yourself is this, "How am I doing in keeping words of gossip out of my mouth?"

Gossip is dangerous to participate in and to be around. No matter how mature a person, he cannot listen to gossip and not be affected. It is imperative that we recognize gossip in our own lives and distance ourselves from these words.

What then is gossip?

It is easier for us to recognize gossip when its words are horribly slanderous about a person's sex life, or just not believable in its sensational exaggeration about a person's past. We can recognize and distance ourselves from these words quite fast. But what about that little guilty pleasure of the supermarket tabloid headline or the latest news we might hear about our neighbors or pastor?

Gossip can be defined as sharing negative information with someone about another person when that someone has no need to know it. Herein lies the heart of gossip—involving others where they just don't need to be involved, sharing information with others when they don't need to know the information and wouldn't be part of the solution to the problem anyway.

Gossip can also include words that are true about a person. However, just because something is true doesn't make the information prudent to be shared. Can you feel the sting of gossip in these words?

- Did you know he had been married before?
- I understand he went bankrupt twice.
- You know she had a nervous breakdown some years ago.

One of the more destructive forms of gossip can actually happen in the church. It takes place in prayer groups. Most of us have experienced it at one time or another. Gossip is shared in the name of "getting all the information so we know how to pray right." This is unnecessary because God already knows the details and doesn't require us to remind Him with the minutiae.

As followers of Christ we're not to be involved in any kind of gossip. We are meant to prefer one another and outdo one another in showing honor. When it comes to our relationships with other believers, we are admonished to go out of our way to make sure the words that come out of our mouths show honor and respect.

The words of gossip always and on every occasion come against the most essential of all God's purposes for the church—for its members to live in unity.

## Negativity

Negative: thinking about the bad qualities of someone or something; thinking that a bad result will happen; not hopeful or optimistic.

MOST OF US have the tendency to be negative now and then. However, there are people who are chronically negative. Negative words that come out of a believer's mouth are remnants of the life they knew before coming to know Christ as Savior. They are the language of the world. But Ephesians 2:19 tells us, "Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God." As citizens of heaven we must learn to speak the language of heaven. Let me remind that you know a person's country of origin by the language they speak. We have been raised up with Christ and belong to His kingdom now. What are the words of His language? Compassionate words, kind words, encouraging words, and words of praise and worship—this is the vocabulary of heaven. In the kingdom of heaven there will be no negative words, no critical or hurtful words. Our Lord has come to give us freedom from the negative words that tie us to the past and this world. If we are going to experience His kingdom on earth, then we must be free from judging, criticizing, sarcasm, negativity, complaining, and gossip. We need a revelation, a deeper understanding of this issue of negativism and the negative words that cross our lips.

## WHAT MAKES US NEGATIVE?

At the time when most of us came to Christ, we were struggling with a negative self-concept or view of life. Accepting Christ in our hearts makes us a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). However, we still struggle with our negative behavior and attitudes from the past that linger and prohibit us from seeing ourselves as Christ sees us, as new creations with the old sin and negative bondages gone. For many of us there exists a constant tension of doing what we know we shouldn't do and not doing what we know we should do, of saying what we know we shouldn't say and not saying what we know we should say. It is the struggle that Paul faced and speaks pointedly about in Romans 7:15–20. I don't believe a Christian can speak the words they should speak until they stop speaking the words they shouldn't speak. This is the reason for the fast. The negative words we say carry so much more weight than the positive words we speak, and they are so damaging. The truth is, each one of us has a history of negative experiences, and that history is full of negative input from parents, siblings, relationships, friends, acquaintances, schooling, church, work, and other activities.

## WHAT TO DO ABOUT BEING NEGATIVE

The Lord has another way for us. Through Him we can conquer all things. He wants to bring us freedom from negative words and launch us into His purposes. This launching becomes difficult when we hold on to negative traits and words in our life from the past. Our Lord wants to bring His kingdom into our midst, His kingdom that is full of thanksgiving and joy. So, what are we to do about this negative part of our lives? How do we respond to it and overcome it? It's challenging to rid our lives of the negative residue that resides in us. The negative part of you will always come back, saying, "This is too difficult; no one can do this," or, "You can't escape that trap you're in." This powerful negativity will always exert itself when God begins to call us up to a higher place in Him, and He is always calling us up higher (2 Cor. 3:18).

When the negative words are gone from our life, we are free to stop asking why. Why is a question of fear. It is a question in search of blame. It is a question that reveals a lack of trust in our Lord. The Lord wants to know that He can trust us to wait on Him in all experiences. We know longer ask why; we ask what. If you want to get the right answer, you must ask the right question. You now ask, “What do You want me to learn from this, Lord? What do You want to accomplish in my life? What is my part in this, Lord? What do You want my response to be?” As we fast for forty days, we will be putting an end to all those negative words that have marred our relationships. We will be putting to death the things of the earthly, worldly nature. Paul describes it this way: of which Paul calls malice, slander, and filthy language, abusive language, and all forms of negative words. Therefore put to death the parts of your earthly nature: sexual immorality, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. —COLOSSIANS 3:5 But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. —COLOSSIANS 3:8, NAS As we embrace daily the forty-day word fast, we will starve these negative words into oblivion, and there will be no fertile soil in our life for them. We will create a spiritual immune system that is strong and vibrant and that insulates us from the negative words of the world. We will be on guard, always vigilant to hear God’s words of instruction and direction about every situation that challenges us to trust Him more. We will come to understand that He is in all things: “For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be glory forever! Amen” (Rom. 11:36).