

## “Choosing Words Wisely”

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July 1, 2018

James 3

### CHILDREN’S TIME

I have a candle lighter here. We use this to light the candles on our communion table. You have to roll this little dial and click the button to get a little flame and then light the wick.

Now you probably have heard from your mom and dad that you always have to be careful with fire, right? Why?

Because if you are not careful you might catch something that you don’t want to light on fire and then the flames can burn you and other things you don’t want to burn, like the trees in these pictures.



So, we need to be careful with flames.

The Bible teaches us that we need to be careful with the words we speak too.

If we say hurtful things to people it can make them feel bad and nobody wins.

If we choose words that encourage people, build them up and help them, then everyone wins.

What are some words that you might choose that would encourage other people?

You are really good at coloring.  
Thank you for helping me.  
You look nice today.  
I like the lunch you made for me.

When you say something nice and it makes someone else feel good, how do you feel? You feel great!

When we use positive and encouraging words with others, we are doing what God wants us to do, and it also feels good, doesn’t it!

## SERMON

How do words impact the people around us?

Our words don't only impact those around us, but they also affect us as well.

How do the words we use impact us?

"Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me." How many of you agree with that statement? How many disagree? How many didn't raise their hands?

Let's look at both sides. You may remember things that people said to you when you were in third grade. Perhaps, even now when you hear those words, it is difficult for you to relate with the person who spoke them. You just feel angry, or irritated, or bothered.

Singing is a good example. Maybe you or someone you know sang out loud and proud and off key when they were young ... until someone made an off-handed and insensitive comment like "Don't quit your day job." After that, you never sang out loud again, because it both hurt and you believed at the time, and continue to believe through the years right

up until this day, that what they said about you was true.

The comment lingers in your life.

Now, how many of you when you were younger did something like my brother and I did? We built a ramp with some boards and a pile of dirt and went about racing our dirt bikes down a trail and over the ramp to see how far we could fly through the air?

Everyone I know who did this, after a certain point as the ramp was built higher and higher, would wipe out and skin their knees and elbows. How many of you who did things like that when you were young are still putting bandaids on those scrapped knees and elbows? Or did they heal?

It is pretty clear. Words are much more powerful than sticks and stones.

People from our church have had conversations with various organizations or groups in the past several months and the power of words has been an under current theme. The choice of words that we use has been highlighted as very important.

Several weeks ago we had the interfaith WISDOM group to share with us about their various

experiences of faith. They gave us a handout that described the importance of the labels and descriptors we use within inter-faith conversations.

Also echoing the need to be sensitive to where others are coming from was I'Sha Schultz, who came out from the Ruth Ellis Center in Highland Park for the pancake breakfast we hosted.

The Ruth Ellis Center serves the LGBTQ population and much of the conversation around the breakfast table centered on the misunderstandings between people who have a different sexual orientation and the words we inadvertently use that can be offensive or off putting.

Prior to that, our Community Engagement Team visited Affirmations, an organization in Ferndale that also serves the LGBTQ population. They have designed a whole program for groups of people, including churches, who wish to learn accurate terminology for when they speak with and about the population they serve.

So, we have been told from various places recently that it is crucial to pay attention to our language, especially when relating with

people from marginalized populations.

Paying attention to the words we use in order to be helpful and constructive is nothing new. The book of James dedicates a whole chapter to this topic.

### **READ JAMES 3**

James adds that it isn't only good to pay attention to the words we choose, but doing this is wise. It is wise to use words that build up, demonstrate gentleness, and bring about peace. This is what God desires for the Church.

Our words can lead to hurt and pain, for sure. Sometimes a response to certain words is for a person to limit their options and potential in life, including career options. Like the child who never wants to sing again after being embarrassed or ridiculed.

The words we choose to speak can set the whole life course for a young child. Words are powerful. They can deeply harm — but they can also heal.

New York Times best-selling author, Lori Handeland understands the power of the words we speak. She wrote,

*“Words have power. Words begin and end wars. They create and destroy families. They break hearts. They heal them. If you have the right words, there’s nothin’ on earth you can’t do.”*

In Genesis, God spoke the world into existence. Jesus spoke to demons and they left, he spoke and people were healed.

You and I also speak things into existence. Did you realize that we have that kind of power? This is part of what it means to be made in the image of God. We are co-creators with God of this world

Each of you here who is married is together with your spouse because one of you spoke the words (or some variation of them): “Will you marry me?” and the other spoke “Yes.” And thereby you created meaning together as a married couple and you have ever since been living inside that new reality.

Think of this — every business in the history of this country or any other country is or was in existence because someone spoke it into being. Each business began as an idea which was given life through specific words spoken.

Through the words we choose, we literally craft the world in which we live. Through our words, we give

meaning to our experience,  
meaning to our relationships,  
meaning to all things around us.

Words are powerful!

When you were eight years old, someone may have said that you were not good at math. Sometimes people say these things randomly for no reason at all. Maybe the one speaking was insecure about how well they know math. Maybe they want to feel superior and they do that by putting others down.

But the catch is that when you heard it you believed it was true about you. Those words rang in your mind and then in your heart over the course of years of time. As a result, you told yourself over and over again that you were not good at math. Perhaps you have lived like that from that moment years ago right up to this day.

This message, even though not true, became a reality in your life because someone spoke a few words many years ago.

A friend of mine named Jenny was a middle school math teacher her whole career. She made it her mission to unwind these defeating messages about math. She encouraged all of her students, especially the young girls in her

classes, with the idea that no matter what anyone else had said in the past they could be good at math.

Jenny went out of her way to make it fun, exciting, and engaging. She would take groups of girls to math competitions, and they would win. She was convinced that they would win for no other reason than that she believed so strongly in their brilliance and kept choosing words to reinforce this idea. Her words changed the way those girls understood themselves. They became expanded human beings through intentional and wise word choice.

Words have power! Therefore we need wisdom to use them well.

Recently, we have been talking about hospitality. Words chosen wisely and our deliberate actions are what create the space of radical hospitality for the people our congregation meets.

This is the focus of the passage from James.

We now have a place to display expressions of what radical hospitality looks like.

Leslie, Carol and I set up a bulletin board in the Welcome Center, right outside my office. At the top of the

board it says “Expressions of Radical Hospitality.” Then it says “What is your expression?”

The point of this new bulletin board is to engage us to dig deeper into what it means to be a radically hospitable church. One way we can do this is with wisely chosen words that create the space of radical hospitality.

We don’t do this to be politically correct. We do it to be compassionate, to be loving, to value other people and show them respect. Everyone wants to be respected and valued and this is our responsibility as the church.

You might have noticed in our bulletin that we now have some common terms that have replaced our typical insider language. So, after the offering we have a “Song of Response” instead of the “Doxology,” and at the end of the service we have a “Closing Blessing” instead of a “Benediction.” Instead of “Prayer of Invocation” we have “Opening Prayer.”

These words that are more familiar in society, hopefully will help a guest who has never been to church feel like they can understand what’s going on. Maybe they will feel more

connected to what is happening in worship.

If we want to be a warmly open congregation for new people, we will be thinking about the words and language we use. Certain words we can choose will reinforce the idea that we are an exclusive group and people on the outside are not really welcome.

But, when we choose words wisely we communicate that our space is open and inviting for all people.

When we choose to see our faith and life through the lens of radical hospitality we will see all of our printed material, our signage, and all aspects of our physical space differently.

Even more importantly though, the radical hospitality lens will have us consider anew how we relate with others, how we speak with people. How we include them. How we respect them. How we value them and show interest in who they are as human beings.

Are there people in your life, maybe neighbors or people you see at work or other places who you may not hang out with but you know a bit?

I invite you to think about one of these people. How might it feel to

invite them to lunch or a cup of coffee sometime? Think about the world from their perspective for a minute. Do you think they would enjoy the experience? What might it add to their week? How might it enrich them as a fellow human being?

What words could you use that would communicate genuine interest in them?

What words could you use that might have them feel respected and valued?

Maybe, instead of lunch or coffee, you could invited them to come with you to worship some Sunday morning? Would that enrich their life? If not, then what might?