

THE POWER OF WORDS

“Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. ⁶ The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one’s life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. ” ~James 3:5-6

We have all heard the old adage “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” What an untrue statement! Words can hurt; they can cause wounds that are deep and crippling. Words can either build up or destroy people. Compare the positive and negative powers of the tongue:

A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger ~Pro. 15:1

The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life, but a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit ~Pro. 15:4

He who guards his mouth and his tongue keeps himself from calamity ~Pro. 21:23

Through patience a ruler can be persuaded, and a gentle tongue can break a bone ~Pro. 25:15

Speech that is like “apples of gold in settings of silver” starts with the heart, not the tongue. When our heart’s desire is to glorify God and point others to Christ, the Holy Spirit will teach us how to encourage with words and connect with others.

- Read Phil 4:8-9. “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. ⁹ Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.”

Thoughts precede words, so the instruction in Philippians 4:8-9 are useful guidelines for speech as well. To avoid negative, critical speech, ask yourself these questions before speaking:

1. *Is what I am thinking true?* If I say what I am thinking, will it give an accurate impression?
2. *Is what I am thinking noble and honorable?* Noble means that we are to move through life as though the world is the courtyard of God. Will my words reflect an awareness of God’s continual presence?
3. *Is what I’m thinking right?* Are my words appropriate to say at this time? Is my urge to speak a prompt from God or a selfish desire?
4. *Is what I am thinking pure?* What is the reason for my thoughts? Is my desire to build up or tear down the other person?

5. *Is what I am thinking lovely or pleasant?* The Greek word translated lovely comes from the verb that means to “excite love.” Will my words bring hearers into a deeper awareness of God’s love?
6. *Is what I am thinking admirable?* The word admirable describes a very holy silence that took place just before worshipers offered sacrifices in the temple. Paul cautioned us to practice that holy silence in our hearts. Be silent for a moment and ask - Are there words pure enough to present as a holy offering to God?
7. *Is what I am thinking praiseworthy?* Peter used this word in 1 Peter 2:9 “But you are a chosen people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” Praiseworthy thoughts focus on my identity in Christ and result in speech that motivates others to godly living.
~these seven thoughts were taken from the book *Treasures of Encouragement* by Sharon W. Betters.