

LIVING
IT OUT



**DAILY
BIBLE
STUDY**



CEDARCREEKCHURCH

THE WORDS BETWEEN US

Monday, March 13, 2017

One of life's wonderful truths is that each of us – regardless of our age, status, or financial means – possesses a gift that can bring comfort and happiness to others. This gift is of great value, but costs nothing, and we all possess it in limitless abundance. And yet, some of us share this gift sparingly with others who crave it, even those whom we know and love.

The gift in question is the subject of this week's final installment of “The {Space} Between Us” series – the fifth and last component of author Gary Chapman's “Five Love Languages: **Words of Affirmation.**”

Words of Affirmation is effectively about giving voice to positive thoughts. As Chapman says, actions don't always speak louder than words. In fact, for those who value this Love Language above the others, nothing speaks louder than an unsolicited compliment.

In Proverbs 18:21, Solomon wrote, “The tongue can bring death or life.” To be certain, harsh words can leave a lasting imprint on the recipient, particularly one who values Words of Affirmation. Contrarily, as Chapman says, “kind, encouraging, and positive words are truly life-giving.”

Author Mark Twain once said, “I can live for two months on a good compliment.” (Although we have it on good authority that Twain did not take the Love Languages test, it's fair to assume that he would have scored high on Words of Affirmation!) But the very fact that Twain spoke so glowingly of his fondness for compliments most likely speaks to their relative rarity in his experience. Why is this?

For those of us who do not count Words of Affirmation among our top Love Languages, it may simply be a case of not consciously appreciating the indelible impact that kind words can have on others. In the course of our busy days and lives, it's all too easy to let a kind word evaporate from our fleeting thoughts, unspoken. For parents, we can be so consumed with shaping and correcting our children that we miss the invaluable opportunity to build their self-worth and confidence with a kind comment or observation. In the work environment, we may fear that kind words may be misconstrued as “kissing up,” that our views may be inconsistent with those of others or, worse yet, that complimenting others may serve to diminish our accomplishments or standing.

If you've failed to share the gift of kind words, whether due to oversight or reluctance, now is the time to invest in your relationships by giving voice to your positive thoughts.

In her talk this past weekend, CedarCreek's Lauren Snyder spoke of the value she finds in kind words, even when the circumstances may not appear to merit them. As she noted, the kindness of such words is evidence that those who share them love her enough to see past imperfections and find some beauty; they care enough to give voice to a positive thought spoken in her Love Language, which is Words of Affirmation.

Lauren also noted the power of words as depicted in Scripture. In John's account (John 12:1-8), he shares the story of Jesus attending a dinner in the home of Lazarus just before the Passover celebration. After the dinner, Mary of Bethany took a 12-ounce jar of expensive perfume made from essence of nard and anointed Jesus' feet with it, wiping his feet with her hair.

Judas Iscariot (the disciple who would soon betray Jesus) lashed out at Mary, saying, "That perfume was worth a year's wages. It should have been sold and the money given to the poor." Reacting to the harsh words of Judas, Jesus replied, "Leave her alone. She did this in preparation for my burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."

In this passage, as is so often the case, Jesus artfully uses words of affirmation – in this instance to demonstrate his love for Mary by defending her, describing her gift as "good," and articulating why she did it (to anoint his body for burial). In short, Jesus illustrated three critical components which we, too, can apply to speaking Words of Affirmation:

- 1. Communicate Truth** – It can be argued that there was a kernel of truth in the criticism of Mary's lavish gift; but even so, communicating raw truth – particularly in the company of others and without full context – isn't always helpful. Instead, when we consider Jesus' example of truth-telling, we see the appropriate way to do this.
- 2. Consider Timing** – When we consider the timing of our words, we acknowledge that just because something is true doesn't mean that it needs to be expressed now, or here ... or even by us. In Mark 14:9, in speaking of Mary's gift, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, wherever the Good News is preached throughout the world, this woman's deed will be remembered and discussed." With impeccable timing, he shared a compliment that echoes to this day.

3. Control Tone – Perhaps most importantly, Jesus' tone demonstrated an innate understanding of Mary's heart and intent.

John 12:1-8

¹Six days before the Passover celebration began, Jesus arrived in Bethany, the home of Lazarus—the man he had raised from the dead. ²A dinner was prepared in Jesus' honor. Martha served, and Lazarus was among those who ate with him.³Then Mary took a twelve-ounce jar of expensive perfume made from essence of nard, and she anointed Jesus' feet with it, wiping his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance. ⁴But Judas Iscariot, the disciple who would soon betray him, said, ⁵"That perfume was worth a year's wages. It should have been sold and the money given to the poor." ⁶Not that he cared for the poor—he was a thief, and since he was in charge of the disciples' money, he often stole some for himself. ⁷Jesus replied, "Leave her alone. She did this in preparation for my burial. ⁸You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."

TRY IT

This week, consider taking advantage of these opportunities that Lauren outlined to share Words of Affirmation in your relationships:

- 1. Seven Days of Encouragement:** Start each day this week by asking God to reveal someone who needs unexpected encouragement... and then *you* be the one to provide it! Try to encourage one person a day for all seven days.
- 2. You Matter Cards:** Identify a compliment that you haven't yet communicated to someone in your life. Write a note expressing the positive thought, using one of the YOU MATTER cards that were distributed at our campuses this past weekend, and mail it.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we thank you for blessing us with the people and relationships in our lives. Help us to be mindful of the "languages" we each speak, and to be thoughtful, humble, and loving in expressing our words. Help us also to choose our words carefully and share them generously as we give voice to our positive thoughts – for the good of one another and your kingdom. Amen.

This post was written by Todd Romain, a regular contributor to and editor of the LivingItOut Bible Study.

Sticks and Stones

Tuesday, March 14, 2017

"Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me," is an adage that has been around for over 100 years, but is it true? I can say for certain that, overall, I have been hurt by words way more than I have ever been hurt physically. Furthermore, many of those hurtful words were spoken by Christians. I would like to think that most of the hurtful words spoken by Christians were well-meaning, but I'm not so sure. I have also spoken words that were not well-meaning; perhaps not intentionally hurtful (well, maybe once...) but not kind, gentle, or loving to be sure.

Words hold tremendous power, and if we are not careful, they can do as much damage, or more, as sticks or stones. Physical bruises fade, but wounds created by harsh words can last so much longer. As this [song](#) by Hawk Nelson says: "Words can build us up, words can tear us down, start a fire in our hearts or put it out."

This can be a bit tricky for Christians. We are supposed to be truthful and hold each other accountable, but in a kind and loving way. Sometimes we get too caught up in being right, and it turns into self-righteousness. Or, we speak without thinking it through, either out of anger, pride, or jealousy. Those words hurt people and don't show the light of Christ.

At the same time, Words of Affirmation can have incredible power as well. Telling our children we are proud of them or expressing our affection to a loved one can make a huge difference in the way they feel about themselves and the way they behave towards others. The ripple effect can be immense. Think about the way Jesus talked to people. He wasn't hurtful, but he always told the truth. He held people accountable for their actions, but they always knew he loved them.

This is why Paul is so adamant about his directions to the church at Ephesus. The heading of the section of today's Scripture is titled "Living as Children of the Light" (NLT). He tells them that they know how Christ treated people, so they must do the same. It might be tempting to think that Paul is exaggerating in verse 29 when he writes, "let *everything* you say be good and helpful," (italics mine) but nothing in the text tells us that Paul is exaggerating. Instead, it seems that as followers of Christ, we are expected to be careful with everything we say. This is a challenge for us all.

Ephesians 4:29

Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.

What steps can you take to be sure that everything you say is good and helpful?

Example: Romans 12:2; Philippians 4:8

PRAYER

Father, I praise you for the tremendous gift of verbal communication. Help me to remember what a huge responsibility it is as well. Thank you for giving me Scripture to guide me and show me how to shine your light to whomever I speak. Amen.

A Heart of Darkness

Wednesday, March 15, 2017

Do you ever remember hearing someone tell you that if you didn't have anything good to say, then you shouldn't say anything at all? What does that even mean?

Apparently, whoever said that to you may have known a little more than they were letting on. Come to find out, if you don't have anything good to say, it's more than likely related to the condition of your heart.

Jesus said that what you say flows from what is in your heart (Luke 6:45). I'm not sure that as a society, we quite understand that it's not our words that determine our actions, but our heart.

It seems that a lot of us have a severe heart condition, and we need help. In the deepest caverns of our hearts, there are still some shadows lurking within, and their mission is to destroy any goodness that is left. However, there is hope.

Martin Luther King Jr. said, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness, only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that."

Jesus said, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it." (John 1:5)

What is the condition of your heart? Has it been penetrated by the light?

Last weekend, Lauren defined Words of Affirmation as "giving voice to a positive thought." Unfortunately, we tend to give voice to negative thoughts before positive thoughts.

How can we have positive thoughts when we focus on our circumstances or the trivial things of life? God isn't in the business of changing our circumstances; he is in the business of changing lives and transforming hearts.

If we want words of affirmation to flow out of our mouths from the depths of our heart, then we need to receive the words of affirmation that Christ gives to us when we let him into our lives.

He is constantly giving us words of affirmation, here are just a few that we can stand on:

- *I am a new creature in Christ. (2 Corinthians 5:17)*
- *I am no longer a slave, but a child, an heir. (Galatians 4:7)*
- *I am redeemed and forgiven by the grace of Christ. (Ephesians 1:7)*
- *I am God's workmanship created to produce good works. (Ephesians 2:10)*

Luke 6:45

A good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart, and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart. What you say flows from what is in your heart.

How we talk to ourselves, and what we spend our time thinking about determines how we will speak to others. We think that only sick people have issues with their heart. The truth is, we all have heart problems.

Jesus is the only one that can heal our hearts and defeat the darkness that lies inside them. The more we spend time in his Word, the more it penetrates those gloomy caverns.

As we seek to speak words of life into others, remember that Jesus loves us; even though we were still sinners, he died for us. Jesus never hesitates speaking Words of Affirmation to us. He longs to talk to us and remind us who we are. When we speak to others, we are merely a reflection of the love that Jesus has given us...

Or...

We are the absence of it.

What is the condition of your heart?

What kind of words do you use when you are feeling frustrated or overwhelmed?

Read the article: ["Who Does God Say That I Am?"](https://bible.org/article/who-does-god-say-i-am) at Bible.org.

(<https://bible.org/article/who-does-god-say-i-am>)

Which one speaks to you the most? Read this every day for one month.

PRAYER

Lord, let the words that come out of my mouth be words that you would speak. Change the condition of my heart to be in alignment with your Word, remind me who you say I am, and correct any negative patterns that I may have. Amen.

This post was written by Stephen Dull, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut Bible Study,

Evangelism Can Be Scary

Thursday, March 16, 2017

There's an old, old story about a husband who never told his wife he loved her. When asked why he was unwilling to say the words, his reply was, "I told her I loved her when we got married. If I ever stop, I'll let her know!" It's kind of funny but in a sad, heartbreaking sort of way. In decades past, emotions weren't on display as they are today. Many children grew up never hearing words of love from their parents, especially their fathers. It just wasn't done. The thought was that the parents showed their love for their children by providing for their needs, making sure they had food, clothing, and educational opportunities, not by their words. Unfortunately, many of these kids, now adults, have empty emotional tanks, wanting, needing those words of love from their parents. No act, or possession, or substance, or person can fill the place of those missing words.

And so it is with the gospel. You and I may serve someone because we love Jesus. Someone else will serve because it makes them feel better to have helped another human. You don't have to be a Christian to love and serve other people - lots of folks do it. "Preach the Gospel at all times, and when necessary, use words" is a quote often misattributed to St. Francis of Assisi. It's a great thought, but without words, how will anyone know why you serve? How will anyone know that Jesus has changed your life, and how can they know that he makes the same offer to them? You may be familiar with the story in Acts 8:26-35 where the Holy Spirit told the Apostle Philip to, "Go up to that chariot and stay near it." In the chariot was an Ethiopian man who was reading the Old Testament Book of Isaiah, not understanding a thing he was reading. Philip was there and asked him if he knew what the Scripture meant, which talked about how he was led like a sheep to the slaughter, etc. He said, "How can I understand unless someone explains it to me?" And that's precisely the point! There are many theories, opinions, and thoughts about Jesus. But you have a story to tell about Jesus that is yours alone. No one can dispute it.

1 Peter 3:15 says, "But in your hearts set apart Jesus as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect." Part of being prepared is found in these verses:

Colossians 4:5-6

⁵ Live wisely among those who are not believers, and make the most of every opportunity. ⁶ Let your conversation be gracious and attractive so that you will have the right response for everyone.

So, what's your story? This week, spend some time writing it down. Make different versions, suitable for different audiences, so you're prepared with the right response. Make a 20-second elevator version. Make a 2-5 minute version. Make one that lasts 10 minutes. Look at it. Pray about it. Ask God to help you distil out the most important aspects, so that you can be ready. Fear usually prevents us from sharing the good news about Jesus. Preparation goes a long way in reducing fear. You know what to say – it's your story! But remember, share it with gentleness and respect!

PRAYER

My Jesus, my Savior! Give me the courage to tell the people in my life how you came to me when I needed you most, even though I may not have realized it at the time. Help me with the words to say that will open their hearts to understand what an incredible difference you have made in my life. I pray that the way I live now will make them curious about you and that you give me the boldness to tell my story. Amen.

This post was written by Lauri White, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut Bible Study.

Loose Lips Sink Ships

Friday, March 17, 2017

As children, we learned the highly inaccurate adage, “Sticks and stones will break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” I broke a lot of bones as a kid. I can’t even tell you how many, and I don’t remember all of the causes. But I have vivid recollections of the words people said to me that both built me up and tore me down. This makes a lot of sense, based on my 5 Love Languages Assessment, which identifies Words of Affirmation as, by far, the number one way I receive love. My assessment says, “Insults can leave you shattered and are not easily forgotten. Kind, encouraging, and positive words are truly life-giving.”

I was fortunate to have parents who were constantly encouraging me with their words and their support. This was especially true when I played organized sports. Whether I was starting the game or sitting on the bench, my parents were there to cheer me on. Regardless of the box score, my dad would always ask if I tried my best and if I had fun. I would say yes, and he would tell me he was proud of me. Now, married and with children of my own, I still remember my dad's words, just as I am sure the servants in Matthew 25 remembered the day their master returned and said, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" Likewise, the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke each recount the transfiguration, during which God says of Jesus, "This is my son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." How incredible would it be to hear God say those words to us when we meet him in heaven?

It is easy to see how our words can encourage others, through simple compliments, saying thank you, or recognizing a job well done. It might be easier still to see how words can destroy others. But how do our words affect God? And how can we use them to show God love? One of the most practical ways is to pray. Even though God knows what we need before we even ask, Proverbs 15:8 says, “The prayer of the upright is his delight.” Praising God by singing is another way we can use our words for God, even if you sing as poorly as I do. God gave us our voices, and he loves to hear them! And if singing isn’t your thing, try writing your words down. Ben Snyder often talks about his passion for journaling, and he even challenged the church to try it during the “Design Your Life” series. Take the time to reflect on what is going on in your life, and how you responded, specifically with your words.

Imagine living by the words of the Psalmist in 71:8: “I can never stop praising you; I declare your glory all day long.” How would your life be different if you

were constantly singing the praises of God, using your words to glorify him and honor others?

Psalm 71:7-8

⁷My life is an example to many,
because you have been my strength and protection.

⁸That is why I can never stop praising you;
I declare your glory all day long.

Prayer

God, forgive me for the times I have used my words to gossip, to hurt others, or to embarrass or curse someone. I want to know what it feels like to hear you say, "Well done." Use me to bring that joy to someone's life by using my words to edify them and to lift them up. Amen.

This post was written by Ryan Cook, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut Bible Study.