

THE POWER OF SPEAKING THE RIGHT WORDS

By Robert J. Tamasy

We live in unprecedented times. The airwaves are filled with words, as is the Internet. Thanks to social media, anyone with the capacity for talking can post any information, ideas and opinions they choose to present. Because TV news is now 24/7, there is no end to commentary and expositions on the day's news and events. The round-the-clock hours must be filled with sound, not silence. As a result, we could say that never in the history of humankind has so much been said by so many – about so little.

One consequence of this is that people so eager to speak often fail to pause and consider what they are speaking. Positive or negative, gentle or harsh, they open their mouths and let the words fly out. It reminds me of Proverbs 10:19 which warns, *“When there are many words, wrongdoing is unavoidable. But he who restrains his lips is wise.”*

But even if we choose not to get caught up in the communications chaos of social media and limit our exposure to the rantings that are so common in the mass media, we still are not immune to the power of words for good or for ill. We can be the perpetrators or victims (or both) of words carelessly used.

Email is a wonderful and rapid way of communicating. But if we do not exercise caution by first reviewing and reconsidering what we have written before hitting “Send,” we might regret it later. Especially if what we write is in a moment of anger or high emotion. The same can be true when leaving voicemail messages or texts on our smartphones. What sounded good and fitting at first may cause considerable distress later.

With effective communicating so essential for the 21st century business and professional world, but at the same time so challenging, here are some principles from the Bible that can be helpful to us:

Choose our words wisely. I have known people who were more than eager to give others a piece of their mind that they could not afford to lose. I must admit to times when I was guilty of that myself. Considering in advance the impact of the words we intend to say can determine whether they will be beneficial or destructive. *“A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver. Like an earring of gold or an ornament of fine gold is a wise man’s rebuke to a listening ear”* (Proverbs 25:11-12).

Consider our words as tools for building up, not tearing down. In our world – and the marketplace in which we spend so much of our time – we find so much negativity, often involving words spoken and written with bad intentions. It is not necessary for us to contribute to that. By using words that lift up rather than tear down, we can make a significant difference. *“Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear”* (Ephesians 4:29).

Counter words that are hurtful. Have you ever watched someone after he or she has been the target of angry or vindictive words? Perhaps you have been one of them at times yourself. Knowing the pain and discomfort that hurtful words can cause, we should strive instead to offer words that heal, encourage and inspire. *“Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing”* (Proverbs 12:18). Do not be part of the communications disease. Rather, strive to be part of the cure.

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. What are your thoughts and reactions in general to what is being communicated these days on social media and through the mass media? How does what you hear and read affect your mood and attitudes as you proceed through a typical day?
2. How tempting is it to send impulsive messages to others while experiencing strong emotions? Have you ever sent an email, a text or left a voicemail that you later regretted? What was the impact of what you expressed and the way you expressed it?
3. Why is it sometimes so difficult to do as suggested – to pause and consider what we intend to say before it is said or sent – before it is too late to undo the damage?
4. In what ways can the power of words be used – and abused or misused? What does the way we use words have to say about us and the kinds of people we are?

*NOTE: If you have a Bible and would like to read more, consider the following passages:
Proverbs 10:20-21, 12:14, 13:3, 15:4; Ecclesiastes 10:12; Matthew 12:33-37; Romans 15:1-4*

Challenge for This Week

This week might be a good time to evaluate how you communicate with others – not only the content but also the way you express your thoughts and ideas. Do you tend to be impulsive, immediately speaking what is on your mind, or do you take the time necessary to consider what you are about to say and how it will be received by those who hear or read it?

If you have any trusted friends or colleagues, people you know that have your best interests at heart, you might ask them to help in this evaluation. And if they are open to it, you can help them as well. If you are in a CBMC group, there might be a good opportunity during your next meeting to discuss this.