

The Power of Words

“One small step for man; one giant leap for mankind.” We remember those words spoken by Apollo 11 astronaut Neil Armstrong, as he took man’s first step on the moon. “I have a dream” is another famous line, spoken by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. His eloquent address peacefully encouraged our nation to live up to its ideals for the equality of all people. “Four score and seven years ago” were the first of 272 words of Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address. “Our Father, who art in heaven” are the most recited words in the history of mankind. It is from the prayer that Jesus taught at the Sermon on the Mount that we know as the Lord’s Prayer. It outlines what our relationship with God should be.



Memorable words. You probably also remember when someone said a kind word to you at just the right time to make a difference in your life. It might have been constructive criticism or guidance expressed in a loving way. You may not remember every word of what was said, but you vividly remember how the conversation made you feel or that it was just what you needed at the time.

When we say things the words have the power to build up a person or to crush them. Once the words are spoken we can’t take them back. People may forgive us for ill-chosen words but chances are they won’t forget them. After all, words reveal the condition of our heart. Said in anger the results won’t be very positive. Said in the heat of the moment they are a knee-jerk reaction that may be what we really think. There is no “undo” button for what we say. Had we waited and thought through an appropriate response we might not have had to apologize later.

Our personal interactions won’t be quoted like Neil Armstrong’s 1969 first step on the moon, the 1963 “I have a Dream” speech or 100 years prior, Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address (1863). We can, however, speak to an individual in a way that touches their heart. Well-chosen words address issues they are feeling and can be extremely powerful.

Our words can heal anxiety (see Proverbs 12:25 below). Gentle words can reduce anger and resentment (Proverbs 15:1). Well spoken words can heal ignorance and self-deception (Proverbs 27:5). Words can also affirm other people when they need support (1 Thessalonians 5:11). What you say to people can reflect kindness and gentleness balanced with wisdom and honesty. Well spoken words can put you in a position to help someone because they know you understand and care about them. Here are some examples of appropriate scripture verses:

- **Anxiety:** *Anxiety weighs down the heart, but a kind word cheers it up (Proverbs 12:25).*
- **Anger and resentment:** *A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger (Proverbs 15:1).*
- **Ignorance and self-deception:** *Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses (Proverbs 27:5).*
- **Balance:** *Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone (Colossians 4:6)*
- **Avoiding gossip:** *Without wood a fire goes out; without a gossip a quarrel dies down (Proverbs 26:20).*
- **Your own restraint:** *The one who has knowledge uses words with restraint, and whoever has understanding is even-tempered (Proverbs 17:27).*
- **Listen first.** *My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires (James 1:19-20).*
- **Affirm others:** *Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.*

Your caring conversation may not be history changing but may be life changing. Carefully chosen words are powerful and help people deal with the issues they face.

Question: What types of conversation do you need to improve – honest, non-deceptive, kind, gentle, timely, unprejudiced, forthright and speaking with few words?

Prayer: Lord. There are people around me who are in need of words of comfort and assistance that I can give them. Help me to be effective as I seek to guide and affirm others with my caring words. Amen.