

“BLESSING OTHERS WITH YOUR WORDS”

Proverbs 9:1-14, Galatians 6:1-5, John 8:1-11

April 21-22, 2018

“As a husband and wife drove together down a highway, they noticed a mule. The husband looked at his wife and said, ‘There goes one of your relatives.’

“She replied, ‘Yeah, I know...by marriage.’”¹

Words! They can build up or they can tear down. They can encourage and inspire or they can destroy. They can support or they can devastate. The use of words can determine whether there will be war or peace. Words can determine if there will be gladness or depression. Words can determine even life or death. Words can either be used for good or they can be used for evil. Our words determine how it is with our life.

In this series of being blessed in order to be a blessing, it is important for us to consider how we might be a blessing to others with the use **of our words**. We read several verses in Proverbs 11 that deal with this. Verses 9 and 11 speak particularly well when they say, “*You can be ruined by the talk of godless people, but the wisdom of the righteous can save you ... A city becomes great when righteous men give it their blessing; but a city is brought to ruin by the words of the wicked.*” Our words can either build up the city around us, or our words can destroy the city around us. As in the opening illustration, we can easily use our words to degrade or belittle or even kill a person emotionally or spiritually.

You’ve all heard the little rhyme that goes, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” That is absolutely **false!!!** Words can be deadly, and many young people today are seeing that, as cyber-bullying is all the rage and our youth are being barraged with hateful and horrible words. The use of our words can have devastating effects on people, **but they can also be used to bless others**. And that is where I want to focus today – how our words can be used to bless others and build the environment around us. So let’s look at 5 different ways that our words can be used to bless others.

¹ (Tony Evans, *Tony Evans’ Book of Illustrations*, [Chicago; Moody Publications, 2009] pg. 344, #1043)

The first way our words can bless others is when we **show courtesy**. Now it doesn't take us too long to notice how rude the world is. People put each other down, they make nasty side comments, they have cutting remarks and they just like to use their words to disrespect others. It seems that folks use every bit of difference between us to poke fun at, or tease, or degrade or belittle. Economic status, occupation, cultural differences, dialect differences, or even hair color can instigate rudeness from one to another, and that's just the start. Proverbs 11:12 says it very well, "*It is foolish to speak scornfully of others. If you are smart, you will keep quiet.*" Why is that so powerful? Because if you say something negative to someone else, it always, and I mean **ALWAYS** escalates into a battle of the put-downs. That's where the wise saying comes in, "If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all." Instead of using your words to beat up another, use them **to build up and bless** another.

Now, this week you will come across many other people – clerks at the bank, waitresses at the restaurant, your boss or secretary, even people around the neighborhood. You will have all kinds of different people come across your pathway this week, and instead of being rude or crude, use your words to bring a blessing to them. "Please" and "Thank you!" go a long ways in blessing others. Just engaging them in conversation works wonders sometimes, too.

You see, as Christians we are to treat others with dignity (I Peter 2:17). When I was growing up, my brothers and I were trained by my parents to say, "Yes Maam" and "Yes Sir" to those who were older than I was. That made for some interesting interactions with new teachers, because they thought we were smart-mouthing them. But once they knew that we were showing respect, it changed their view and they came to appreciate it. As followers of Jesus we are to show respect for each other (Romans 12:10). Jesus tells all His followers that they are to show love to those around them as a witness that we belong to Him (John 13:34-35). It is especially true with the use of our words. So I invite you to choose someone right now that you can be courteous to this week by using your words to bless them. Write their name down on your sheet. And then find a way to bless their life with your words by showing courtesy.

The second way that we are to bless others is by **offering them mercy**. We all have this problem with sin in our lives. We all make mistakes. How many of you have made a mistake in your life? Raise your hand, that's right, every one of us has made mistakes in our life. It's called being human. Yet there seems to be this mindset that when a person makes a mistake we have the right to blast them or ridicule them or make fun of them. But instead of blasting that person with your words because of their mistake, we can use our words to show mercy and grace.

There are verses throughout the Bible that tell us to forgive and comfort others so that they don't give up or despair (i.e. 2 Corinthians 2:7). By blessing people with the use of our words when they make mistakes, we can uplift them and get them directed in doing better.

Mercy is an attitude that God has toward us. The Old Testament has over 100 times when God is said to be merciful. If we are striving to become like God in our life, mercy is something that we need to practice, especially in our words. But the only way we can show mercy is by becoming hurt. Through the pain and disappointment of being hurt, we have the chance to show mercy to others, INSTEAD of retaliating and berating the other. We are to forgive others, especially when they sin against us.

Remember how much Jesus forgave us (Colossians 3:13)? On the cross He didn't look out and condemn all those who had sinned against and hurt Him. No, Jesus forgave them. In fact, He took all of our sin upon Himself and paid the price for those sins, so as His followers we are to show mercy to others as we have received mercy ourselves (Matthew 5:17).

What would it look like if you were to develop a reputation for showing mercy? What would the folks at work do? How about at home? How would your classmates respond as they come know you as a person who shows mercy rather than retaliation?

The Old Testament person Job was known as one who showed mercy. It was said about him, "*When someone stumbled, weak and tired, your words encouraged him to stand*" (Job 4:4). Isn't that great! He was known as someone who showed mercy and blessed others with his

words. Rather than rub it in that the person had fallen, he encouraged them and blessed them by using his words in a way that picked them up. And we can do the same thing with those around us so that rather than beating them when they are down, we can bring support and encouragement in order to help them out and get them going again.

We can also help people out so that they see **what's left**, not what was lost. Whenever we make mistakes, we always lose something. So help them focus on what's left not what's lost. That's showing mercy to people. They don't need a sermon about the mistake; they need mercy. So bless those around you with your words by showing mercy. That way you won't hold grudges, you won't become bitter, but you'll always touch the life of another with the love of God by showing mercy. And as you show mercy to those around you, it will always come back to you. (Matthew 5:7) *"Blessed are those who are merciful to others, for God will be merciful to them."*

Who needs your mercy right now, today, even this week? So right now, decide upon one you can be merciful to, and then write that person's name on your sheet. Courtesy to one; Mercy to another.

Now, **the third way to bless others with your words** is by **expressing sympathy**. *"You are people of God: He loved you and chose you for His own. So then you must clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience"* (Colossians 3:12). Compassion is another word for sympathy. We are to weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice (Romans 12:15). We are to put ourselves in the place of others and try to understand and affirm somebody else's feelings. That means we are to affirm what their heart is going through right at that moment. Is it pain they are feeling? Identify with that pain. Is it sorrow they are facing? Recognize and understand that sorrow. We are to recognize and validate the feelings that others have so that they know they are not alone in their journey. In that way we are helping them to know that there is help. Our words bring **relief** and **encouragement** through sympathy and compassion.

Our New Testament lesson of Galatians 6 gives us these directions: “*Help carry one another’s burdens and in this way you will obey the law of Christ*” (6:2). Imagine what our lives would look like if each of us were active in helping carry the burdens of another? One person carrying their own burden, **but helping another** with **their** burden. And another carrying their burden but also helping **you carry your** burden. If everyone were to make sure that they were kindly helping out others who were under great burdens, WOW! what a difference there would be in our society.

And when it comes to our faith journey, we are to do the same thing. We are to be merciful with those who have doubts (Jude 22) so that we might gently show them a faithful witness with our words. Sympathy to those who don’t make the connection of faith with their life helps them to see that there is love and patience in those who follow Jesus.

So many times it is easy to criticize one who is going through what Wesley calls the “dark night of the soul.” Each of us at some time question whether God is real, whether He really cares about us, or whether He really hears our prayers. We all have times when our faith grows weak and sputters a bit. Instead of chastising the one who has doubts, we are to encourage them and guide them and put ourselves in their shoes so that we might understand and help them through it. When life sends us those traumatic situations and turns our lives up-side-down, compassion and gentleness and care helps those questioning if God really cares about them see God’s love through you.

You have the power to change the life of someone this week as you show sympathy with them and let your words become a salve to their hurts. Take a moment right now to think about someone you can bless by using your words to show sympathy and compassion. Write that person’s name on the sheet. You bless others when you show courtesy, offer mercy and express sympathy; three people you can bless this week.

Now, I want to read the Gospel lesson today because it gives great light on the last two ways that we can bless others with our words. Listen to John 8:1-11 (READ John 8:1-11)

The fourth way to bless others with your words is harder to do. You bless others **when you speak honestly**. That means you talk about a problem in the relationship that you'd rather not talk about. If you're serious about blessing other people you must care enough to tell the truth even when it's painful, even when it's inconvenient, even when you'd rather ignore the problem and sweep it under the rug. You do it because you value the person in that relationship.

It may be sex, but you can't talk about it. It may be money. It may be a secret habit. It may be an in-law. It may be an ex-spouse. It may be a deep dark fear, but you can't talk about it and you hold it in like it really isn't an issue. Healthy relationships are built on honesty. They depend upon it, and if you aren't honest, it keeps you from an intimate relationship.

Jesus was confronted by the Pharisees who were trying to trap Him. They brought before Him a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. Now I always ask when I read this Scripture, "So they have the woman; where's the man?" They were ready to stone the woman caught in adultery, but they didn't have the other half of the equation. Where was the man?

But look at how Jesus addresses the situation. The Pharisees were condemning the woman for her part. They were ready to kill her for breaking the Law. They were lifting up her flagrant sin and treating her as if they themselves were perfectly in compliance with all of the Laws of God. And Jesus honestly confronts them by saying, "*Whichever one of you has committed no sin may throw the first stone at her*" (John 8:7). In this desperate situation, when the Pharisees could have been working to help the situation not happen again, all that was there was accusation, anger, vengeance, and "justice." But Jesus challenged them to look at their own hearts and then decide if they would be willing to face the same kind of punishment for their own sin in their life as this woman was facing in her life.

Having dissolved the situation, Jesus then looks at the woman "*and said to her, 'Where are they? Is there no one left to condemn you?' 'No one, sir,' she answered. 'Well, then,' Jesus said, 'I do not condemn you either. GO, BUT DO NOT SIN AGAIN'*" (8:1-11).

Not only did Jesus confront the Pharisees in their sin, but He also confronted the woman

in her sin. He honestly confronted her sin, and then commanded her not to sin again. His honesty exposed the sin of both the Pharisees and the woman, but His honesty also challenged each to change. He blessed the people by using His words in ways that brought understanding, mercy, sympathy and challenge. Jesus' honesty brought about new life.

Here we see that "*an honest answer is a sign of a true friendship*" (Proverbs 24:26). By "*speaking the truth in a spirit of love...*" (Ephesians 4:15), Jesus was able to bring about change in the attitudes of the Pharisees, AS WELL AS bringing about a change in the life of the woman. We're all blind to our own weaknesses, so when we speak honestly to each other, as hard as it may be, we can right the wrongs and bring peace to the situations that drive us crazy.

Is there anyone in your life that you've given permission to get in your face and say, "This needs to be corrected?" It is essential for us to have those persons in our lives so that our blind spots and weaknesses are exposed and we can grow healthy and strong again. Galatians 6:1 gives us this permission. "*My brothers (and sisters), if someone is caught in any kind of wrong doing, those of you who are spiritual should set (them) right; but you must do it in a gentle way....*" Jesus modeled it! He didn't stand there and condemn either the Pharisee or the woman. Instead, with the use of His words, He challenged them in order to bring about correction and holiness.

So we are given the challenge to do the same thing, and address the wrong in the person's life. If you care for that person, if you really love them, TELL THEM THE TRUTH IN LOVE! Who knows, you may be **the one person** who helps that other one to find the real truth and come out of a destructive behavior and regain life. But we are to do it in a way that shows our love for that person rather than our contempt. If you see a person heading down a wrong path, maybe getting involved in an affair, or getting into a stupid business decision, or they're ruining their life on drugs or getting involved in a destructive life choice, and you stand by and watch them do it and let them do it and say, "It's none of my business," that's showing contempt, not love. Somebody's got to care enough and love them enough to say, "Don't do this! You're making a

major mistake with your life.” By being honest with our words, we can bring a blessing to those around us as we lovingly confront the wrong and gently guide them away from it. *“In the end, people appreciate frankness more than flattery”* (Proverbs 28:23).

Now most of the time people don’t appreciate being confronted on something wrong in their life. It’s hard, it’s sometimes abrasive, and it’s not an easy thing to be told, but when we gently address the direction a person is taking in their life, it can be life saving!

Now I’ve got to say this, too. Being honest and frank with our words is not a license for you to go out and say anything you want, to anybody you want, any time you want. Timing is everything. *“There is a right way and a right time to do everything”* (Ecclesiastes 8:6). So there are three simple rules that go along with this:

1. Compliment in public; correct in private. If there is something to address, always if possible, do it face to face in private. Don’t make a spectacle. Jesus corrected the woman after all the others had gone away. You do the same.

2. Correct them when they’re up, not when they’re down. Make sure that the person is ready to hear what you have to say. Do it when they are awake, not when they’re ready to go to bed. Let them be at their best so that they can hear it and comprehend it and learn from it. The woman that Jesus corrected faced the punishment of breaking the law, but Jesus corrected her gently at just the right time to redirect her life.

3. Be open to correction yourself. You only have the right to help another see their faults if you are just as ready to hear the correction of your own faults.

Now this is important because we all need to be candid as well as connected. Finding intimacy with your spouse or with someone you love will involve conflict. Intimacy grows through conflict. If there is no conflict in your marriage you’re only living on a superficial level. We’re all different and when you get to the basic differences you’re going to have conflict. You married a sinner, men. And she married a bigger one! When you put two sinners together there’s going to be conflict. But conflict is the way to intimacy. And it demands honesty, using

your words to bless each other, not to tear each other apart. If you want the other to become better, the conflict needs to be resolved and it has to be done through your talking about it because you love each other.

So take a moment and write down the name of a person that you can be honest with and lovingly bless them by speaking the truth to them. It may be a friend, a relative, a neighbor, a husband, a wife. Put that person's name down.

The last way to bless others with your words is a much more fun. You bless others when you **affirm them expectantly**. You show courtesy, you offer mercy, you express sympathy, you speak honestly, and then you affirm expectantly. Studies have shown that affirmation and expectation are tremendous tools to bring out the best in other people. We tend to live up to what other people expect of us. When people raise our value by expecting more of us we tend to do that. By **affirming** and **expecting**, you actually encourage.

In this way we can "*encourage one another and build each other up*" (I Thessalonians 5:11). We may never know when a simple word of encouragement is going to change somebody's life. It may just be a throwaway phrase to you, but it can alter someone's destiny. It can be as simple as challenging a person to use their giftedness to help others, like someone good at math to become a math teacher. It could be affirming a talent that someone has that sets their life on course to use that talent to bless others. Statements like "You know what I see in you?" Or "You know what you're good at?" Or "Do you know what I like about you?" affirm that person and give them a challenge that could redirect their entire life.

Here are 4 ways to bring out the best in people around you. 1. **Admire their uniqueness.** I'm saying that you admire that they are different than you. 2. **Appreciate their value.** Bring out the best in other people by appreciating them and increasing their value by doing so. 3. **Assign them a challenge.** Give them something that can stretch their imagination or help them to grow even better than they are. Help them to grow by challenging them. 4. **Affirm their ability.** Empower them by encouraging them as you give them confidence to go after the dream

or project. “You can do this” or “I believe you can make it happen” are huge encouragers.

So who will you affirm this week? Who will you bless with affirmation? Who will you encourage with the use of your words? Write that person’s name down.

These are five ways that God blesses us in the midst of our own lives. He treats you with dignity and courtesy. He offers you mercy. He expresses sympathy for your hurts. He is honest about your faults. He affirms you expectantly. So here’s the secret: you can’t offer these to other people until you’ve first accepted them from God. You can’t do these things with other people until you first accept them from God. Why, because you have to first be filled in order to fill the lives of others. So let Jesus be filling your life in these five ways and then you will be able to do them to others in order to bless them, too. You must first let Jesus be the center of your heart and life so that through you, He can show these things to those around you. You start with Jesus in you and then you can take Jesus to the world.

Let’s pray. Lord Jesus, I know that my words can either bring good or evil. I don’t want to be evil, so I ask that you change my heart so that I might become a blessing to others in the use of my words. Let all that I say show courtesy and mercy and sympathy. Let my words be always true so that I may grow closer to You and to others. And let my words affirm and challenge those around me so that I may be a blessing for You. Jesus come live in me and work through me to show Your love to everyone I meet, in Your precious and holy Name. AMEN.