

Personal Devotions Series

The Awesome Power of the Tongue (Making it Personal in Relationships - Devo #11)

(Youth Ministers: This devotion corresponds to Lesson 6 of the Relationships series. All these devos are © Copyright 2002 Steve Miller - All Rights Reserved.)

Two stories tell us the power of our words both to build up and to destroy:

The Destructive Power of the Tongue

One youth had attended church all his life, until he finally told his parents that enough was enough. The problem? The other youth in his Sunday School class cut him down because he went to a different school. He felt left out because they only talked about their own school events. Now in his 30's, He seldom darkens the door of a church. The insensitive students' words pierced this sensitive guy like a sword, killing any spiritual interest he might have had. Their thoughtless words killed him spiritually.

The Positive Power of the Tongue

One day a schoolteacher asked the assistance of Stevie Morris, a blind student, to find a mouse in her classroom. For the first time, someone had appreciated Stevie's unusual ability to hear. This event changed his life. He began to concentrate on his assets rather than his handicap, and became one of the great pop singers and songwriters of the 70's, Stevie Wonder. His teacher's words brought him life.

From The Power Source

"The tongue has the power of life and death..." (Proverbs 18:21)

"An offended brother is more unyielding than a fortified city, and disputes are like the barred gates of a citadel." (Proverbs 18:19)

"The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell." (James 3:6)

Some people say, "*Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me.*" In the light of these verses, is this saying true? _____ According to these verses, just how powerful are our words? _____

Getting Personal

Tim Shehan said, "*Samson slew 1,000 Philistines with the jawbone of an ass. I have destroyed as many relationships with the same weapon...*"

What practical tips would you give Tim to help him control his tongue? _____

Some people work on their "motor-mouth syndrome" by trying to listen more than they speak. Others may delay a few seconds in order to think of how their words will be taken before they say them. What can you do today to keep from hurting people with your words? _____

Your words can bring either life or death to your family members and friends today. Who are some people that you can intentionally try to build up today with your words? _____

Connecting With God

"Lord, help me today to listen more and speak less. Help me to think before I speak. And help me to develop the habit of building people up with my words, rather than tearing them down."

Changing Your World, One Word at a Time (Making it Personal in Relationships - Devo #12)

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The Power of Carefully Chosen Words

Winston Churchill was arguably one of the greatest men of the 20th century. He rallied the free world to stand against Hitler's onslaught, most likely changing the very course of history. He was especially known for the power of not only his formal speeches, but also of his seemingly spontaneous remarks. But I'm not so sure that they were so spontaneous. Apparently he gave careful thought to what he would say. In fact, someone said that Churchill spent the best years of his life preparing impromptu speeches! No wonder his words impacted the world and influenced history.

From The Power Source

Think through your typical conversations in light of the following verses. Circle the ones that you have the most difficulty living out.

*“If a wise man goes to court with a fool, the fool rages and scoffs, and there is no peace.”
(Proverbs 29:9)*

*“Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices....”
(Colossians 3:9)*

“For I am afraid that when I come...there may be...slander, gossip....” (II Corinthians 12:20)

*“Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue.
(Proverbs 17:28)*

“A man finds joy in giving an apt reply -- And how good is a timely word!” (Proverbs 15:23)

How would you define an "apt reply" or a "timely word?" _____ Think of your teachers at school. Which of them use their words to discourage students?

_____ Which of them use their words to encourage students? _____

_____ Which teachers do students like best and why? _____

Getting Personal

It's truly amazing how our words can make people either like us or hate us. What could you do today to start living out these verses? _____

As one person said, *"Men are like fish. They both get in trouble when they open their mouth."*

So how did it go with your words yesterday? Were you able to hold back those destructive comments and use your words to encourage others? Especially if you've developed the habit of cutting others down, don't be surprised if it takes time and effort to become an encourager.

In most cases, our tongues are beyond our own power to control. We must pray for God to fill us with His Spirit and give us the power to control our words. As J. Sidlow Baxter said,

"The proof that you have God's Spirit in your life is not that you speak in an unknown tongue, but that you know how to control the tongue that you do know about." (J. Sidlow Baxter)

Connecting With God

"Lord, I need help today in controlling my tongue. Remind me to check in with You before I speak. Let me know when I blow it so that I can ask forgiveness and trust you for the power to do better next time. And don't let me get discouraged when I fail. I really want to become the person You want me to be."

Tips For a Tamer Tongue (Making it Personal in Relationships - Devo #13)

(Youth Ministers: This devotion corresponds to Lesson 7 of the Relationships series. All these devos are © Copyright 2002 Steve Miller - All Rights Reserved.)

We Can Change!

One day Benjamin Franklin's friend sharply rebuked him. "Ben," he said, "you are impossible. Your opinions have a slap in them for everyone who differs with you. They have become so expensive nobody cares for them. Your friends find they enjoy themselves better when you are not around." Rather than get defensive or make excuses, like many people would, Franklin took the rebuke seriously and began to work on his relational abilities. The effort paid off in later years as he became one of the most sought after, respected men of his time.

From The Power Source

Just as we did last week, let's reflect on each of these verses, which give insight into how to use our tongues. Circle the ones that you have the hardest time with, or think that you should work on today.

*"Let another praise you, and not your own mouth;
someone else, and not your own lips." (Proverbs 27:2)*

*"A cheerful look brings joy to the heart,
and good news gives health to the bones." (Proverbs 15:30)*

*"He who answers before listening--
that is his folly and his shame." (Proverbs 18:13)*

Listening Pays!

Although listening appears to be easy, it is actually an art that must be learned. Ted Koppel has for years hosted the popular TV program "Nightline." He is paid over \$1,000,000.00 per year to interview important people and lead interesting conversations. Yet, he never writes out his questions beforehand. What then is the key to successful interviews? "I listen." Koppel says. "Most people don't. Something interesting comes along and whoosh! - it goes right past them."

*But Koppel does not consider his ability to be purely natural. He says that he sharpened his ability to listen while travelling with Henry Kissinger as a reporter for ABC news.
(Written by Steve Miller)*

How to Listen

Dale Carnegie writes, "So if you aspire to be a good conversationist, be an attentive listener. To be interesting, be interested. Ask questions that other persons will enjoy answering. Encourage them to talk about themselves and their accomplishments."

But often we don't realize we are monopolizing conversations. One student talked incessantly and wondered why he couldn't make friends with people. I encouraged him and other motor-mouths to adopt "The 2/3 Rule" -- "Try to get others talking at least 2/3 of the time."

Making It Personal

From the verses and discussion above, what do you think God wants you to work on today in your conversations with your family and friends? _____

Connecting With God

"Lord, help me today to take a sincere interest in those around me, asking them questions about things they are interested in, spending more time listening than speaking."

The Smothering Syndrome (Making it Personal in Relationships - Devo #14)

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A Familiar Scene

I've seen it over and over in girl-guy relationships. You've probably seen it too. Here's the story. Guy loves girl. Girl likes guy, but wants some space. Guy can't stand for girl to be with other people. Guy talks to her continually. He's so possessive that the girl feels smothered and ditches him. What went wrong? He missed a principle of relationships that Solomon wrote about 3,000 years ago.

From The Power Source

*"Seldom set foot in your neighbor's house—
too much of you, and he will hate you. (Proverbs 25:17)*

Getting Personal

Smothering does the same thing to a relationship that it does to a fire. It puts it out. Have you ever been smothered in a relationship? _____ How did it feel? _____

_____ Have you seen others smothering people? _____

Why do you think it's so hard for people to realize they're smothering others? _____

In dating relationships, the person who smothers another often says it's because he loves her so much. But if we take a biblical definition of love as being "selfless concern and actions for another person," is the motivation to smother and be possessive coming more from love, or from selfishness? _____

How can you know if you're smothering someone? _____

Is there a relationship that you're in danger of smothering? _____

An old saying goes something like this: "Hold a person you love like a butterfly, with an open hand. If he flies away and returns, he is yours to stay. If he never returns, he was never yours in the first place."

Steve Learns to Trust

Often people smother others because of a lack of faith in God. I well remember as a high school student loving a girl and desperately not wanting to lose her. I lived in fear that she would find someone that she liked better than me and leave me for him. But as I drew closer to God through His Word, He gave me a new perspective. It was as if God said, "Steve, if this girl is the one for you, then nothing in heaven or hell can separate you. If she's not for you, then I've got someone else for you who would be even better for you." Wow! Did that take the fear out of the relationship! After that I could be myself and stop performing for her.

Connecting With God

"Lord, help me to purely love those around me, neither clutching on to them for fear of losing them, nor smothering them to meet my selfish needs. Help me to always relate with the interests of others in mind and trust you to provide the relationships that I truly need."

Caring Enough to Confront (Making it Personal in Relationships - Devo #15)

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A Lonely Man

A Christian mother, Mrs. Kimmel, lay dying in a Pennsylvania hospital. She had been a good mother. You could tell by the concern that her family showed her. Her children who lived nearby stopped by regularly, almost daily, to see her. Two sons who lived far away traveled to see her several times during her illness, calling each morning and evening that they could not be present.

In the same hospital another person lay ill, a man of power, influence and wealth. But no one had visited him since his arrival. His plight, though not as serious as the dying mother, was faced alone, except for hospital staff. He had a wife and children, but they never came. The man asked a nurse about Mrs. Kimmel, wanting to know all about her family. She told him about the extraordinary concern of the brothers who lived far away. Then he asked about Mrs. Kimmel's condition. The nurse replied that she could die any day, almost assuredly within a week.

With tear-filled eyes, this powerful, influential man looked up at the nurse and responded, "You know, I would gladly trade places with Mrs. Kimmel and die a week from now, if for that week I could have a spouse and children who care enough about me not to make me die alone." (From Little House on the Freeway, by Tim Kimmel)

This man had power, influence, and wealth. But he would trade it all for a decent relationship. I wonder what went wrong in his life? Why was it that a grown man, in all his years of life, had failed to cultivate friendships meaningful enough to make the friends want to visit him? I wonder if things could have been different had someone warned him in his earlier years of some traits that were hurting his relationships.

Sometimes, if we really love a person, we have to risk the relationship in order to help the person. It's not easy to do it. But sometimes we must warn those who are headed for heartache.

From the Power Source

"Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted." (Galatians 6:1)

"Like an earring of gold or an ornament of fine gold is a wise man's rebuke to a listening ear." (Proverbs 25:12)

"He who rebukes a man will in the end gain more favor Than he who has a flattering tongue." (Proverbs 28:23)

According to these verses, do we gain favor from correcting someone in the short run, or in the long run? _____ Can we have wrong motives in correcting friends? ____ What should be our motive, the result we are shooting for, according to Galatians 6:1? _____
 _____ If you *enjoy* pointing out faults to those close to you, you're probably doing it with the wrong motives. It's never easy to risk hurting someone. Do you think we should rebuke every person for everything wrong that they ever do? _____ What would life have been like for Jesus and His disciples if Jesus rebuked all of them for every bad motive and every bad thought? _____ How do we choose when a friend's behavior needs to be addressed? _____ Is it better to correct someone in private or in public? _____ Has God's Spirit let you know that you need to try to correct a friend for something that's hurting him or her? _____
 Do you think your rebuke will go over better if you've always been an encourager in the past?

Connecting With God

"Lord, this is hard stuff. I don't like the idea of risking my friendships by occasionally warning my friends of attitudes or actions that are hurting them. But help me to love my friends even more than the relationships."

Taking Care of Blind Spots (Making it Personal in Relationships - Devo #16)

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Stephen Takes Criticism

*Stephen was a 10th grader when he took a job as a sports reporter for his hometown newspaper. His first assignment was to write a story about his school's basketball team. A player had broken a scoring record, making it big news in a small town. So he wrote the story and turned it into the editor, who proceeded to mark up his article with changes. Stephen could have gotten mad at the editor for tearing apart his hard work. He could have ignored the criticism, thinking that he knew quite well how to write. Instead, he loved it, taking everything to heart. Looking back, Stephen says that this editor's ten minutes of criticism taught him more than any of his English Literature, composition courses, fiction courses, or poetry courses in high school and college! He kept on writing and became one of the most successful authors today, Stephen King. (Written by Steve Miller, information from Stephen King, *On Writing, Pocket Books, 2000, pp. 56-58*)*

Although I don't know what Stephen King thinks about the Bible, I can tell you that he greatly benefited by following one of its principles. And the same can be said of many successful business leaders, who claim that one of the great keys to their success is getting input and criticism from their customers and those who work for them.

From the Power Source

*“Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge,
but he who hates correction is stupid.” (Proverbs 12:1)*

*“Plans fail for lack of counsel,
but with many advisers they succeed.” (Proverbs 15:22)*

*“Listen to advise and accept instruction,
and in the end you will be wise.” (Proverbs 19:20)*

Most of us don't like it when people criticize us. Why do we hate it so much? _____
_____. According to these verses, what are the benefits of
getting advice, accepting instruction and loving discipline? _____
_____. What are the consequences of rejecting it? _____
_____.

Wise Counsel and Relationships

Here's a fascinating test. Quickly count the "F's" in the following text:

**FINISHED FILES ARE THE RE-
SULT OF YEARS OF SCIENTIF-
IC STUDY COMBINED WITH THE
EXPERIENCE OF YEARS**

Now, how many did you come up with? Three? If you did, you're like most people. Try again. The total is six! Look at it more carefully. For some reason the brain has difficulty processing the "F's" in the word "of."

The point? Some things that should be obvious are difficult to see. Just like most people are blind to three of the "F's" above, all of us tend to have blind spots in our personalities and people skills that hurt us in our relationships. They are easy to spot in other people -- friendship busters like moose breath, saying dumb or embarrassing stuff, body odor, and I could go on and on. Think about the teachers, family members and students you know who have a hard time making friends. Where are they going wrong?

Getting Personal

It seems so strange. Their faults are so obvious to others, but totally hidden from themselves. But now let's turn around from focusing on others' blind spots and looking at our own. Can't see them, can you? Why? Because they're *blind spots*. Yet, whatever blind spots we have may hurt our relationships for the rest of our lives. How can we find out what they are? We've got to ask them. We desperately need "many advisors" in this area.

Action Points (Not for the Faint of Heart!)

Name some people (friends or family) who you think would be ruthlessly honest with you about your relationships. Tell them you've been doing some study on relationships and you want their input. Get them one on one, either by phone or face to face, and ask them questions like these:

- 1) Do I do any weird stuff that sometimes turns people off?
- 2) Do I pay attention to some people and ignore others?
- 3) Do I hog conversations?
- 4) How do you rate me as a listener?
- 5) Do I concentrate more on the interests of others, or do I mostly talk about myself?
- 6) If you were to wake up one morning and realize that you had been magically transformed into me, what would you change in order to help me (now "you") with my relationships?
- 7) Do you think I choose friends who are a negative, or positive influence?

Connecting With God

"Lord, help me to regularly get input from others about how I'm doing in my relationships. I truly want to put other people before myself, and to love them to You. Continually reveal to me blind spots that may hinder me from being the friend you want me to be."

