

The Power of our Words



The tongue has the power of life and death...

Proverbs 18:21

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.’ John 1:1.

We could all learn something from this well-known Bible verse. Everything begins with a word. You can use words to instill fear and anger and sow the seeds of doubt. The pen really is mightier than the sword. Words have awesome power. They can be used to cut and wound, or to build. The trouble is that all too often, people speak without thinking, and in doing so, their words can have far-reaching consequences that can cause rifts and create all manner of trouble. Hurt feelings are just the beginning.

We’ve all heard the statement “sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me”. I think many of us wish it were this easy. But Words hold power. They create meaning from situations, label circumstances, provide safety in a relationship, or can destroy a relationship. Words are given their power by the way in which they are used and we are the only ones that can control what words we choose to use.

But, it can be really challenging to be constantly aware of our words. Sometimes we wonder if it is worth it. We get frustrated that we are asked to be sensitive or expected to be politically correct. We are drawn to what we perceive as truth about people or circumstances and are eager to right what we believe to be wrong.

I meet with a lot of hurting people on a weekly basis. Many of which who have life-long scars from someone who has used words carelessly. Almost always, the people who have caused the most damage with their words remain unaware of the wounds they caused or are causing. Most of us do not want to intentionally cause harm to someone with our words. So how do we prevent this?

I tell my clients to think of themselves as a mirror when they are talking with or about someone else. When you look in a mirror you see a visual image of yourself. When we hear others words

we derive meaning from those words and our mental mirror becomes distorted. What image is the person you are speaking to see through your words?

This is easiest to see in a parent/child dynamic. When a toddler looks up wide-eyed to his screaming parent, he begins framing meanings about himself through his parent's words. He begins to believe he's a failure, he's annoying, bothersome, or worthless. He views himself through these words and the words become his identity that he may carry for a lifetime. This is true even with adults. And the closer the relationship you have, the more influence you have over their identity and self-worth.

Research tells us that it takes five positive statements to counteract every negative statement we make to an individual. This is true even when our "negative" statement is done in a productive, caring, and loving way. Imagine the damage we do when those criticisms and contempt eek out!

Use your words wisely. Speak life into a broken individual. Speak life into your home: your spouse, your children, or your parents! Speak life into your community: your irritable boss, the inattentive waitress, the individual who was just shamed for his differences.

Words can heal, and words can destroy. It's not easy, but we can better our homes and our world by being aware of our words.