

“THE POWER OF WORDS”
by Rom A. Pegram (7/12/20)

First off, thank you Patti for reading our morning scripture today. To the rest of you ... good morning! And welcome to a brand new worship series starting in July called “The Power of Words.” I am so glad you are all here for this, because it’s going to be one eye-opening series that will hopefully help us all out ... when it comes to *our* words. And today, we’re kicking off this series with a foundational message of the same name—The Power of Words.

Now, I hope we can all agree, as we begin this series, that words do indeed have power. Sociologists have done studies and they’ve developed what they call ‘The Most Powerful Phrases in the English Language.’ Think about that for a moment and see if you can guess what these phrases may be—one having four-words, one with three-words, another with two-words, and a final with just one word. Let me start with this...

- A four-word phrase – Can you guess what this one might be? Four words skillfully put together that are absolutely powerful—impressionable. Do you know what they are? ONCE UPON A TIME. Isn’t that a great phrase? It’s like magical, isn’t it, kind of child-like, reminding us of fairy tales we’ve all heard...
- A three-word phrase – Did you figure this one out? It begins with ‘I’ and ends with ‘you.’ Pretty easy, right? I LOVE YOU.
- A two-word phrase – I took a poll once on this and do you know what the winner was? YOU SUCK. I know, that’s not very nice, but that’s what some of you were thinking, wasn’t it? No. The sociologists tell us the most powerful two-word phrase is ... I’M SORRY (well, a contraction and a word), but there you go.
- A one-word phrase (or ONE WORD) – I. It’s “I,” because it’s somewhat empowering, I guess...

So those are some of the most powerful words in the English language. And there’s no doubt in my mind (and I hope not in yours) that we have to be very careful in life when it comes to our words. Words can be powerful. Words can build up ... or words can tear down. Words are powerful and we have to be careful with each one we allow out of our mouths, and preachers are notorious for snafus; did you know that? A lot of words come out of our mouths, so the chances are pretty good...

My brother, Stan, who you heard preach the past two weeks ... was preaching and their worship band was going to do a song called, “When She Prays”—a song he’d written for a band called ‘pH Balanced’ that we were in together. The song was all about our mother. So that’s who he had on his mind when he was introducing the song. BUT ... here’s what he said (which is a good reason to have things scripted out sometimes)—he said, “The older women in the church may not look like much, but they can sure pray!” (and they’re all in the back row looking at him, not sure they heard him correctly). However, my sister-in-law Sarah was probably laughing out loud, so that kind of gave it away...

Folks, I’ve got to tell you ... no one heard the ‘they can sure pray’ part. Stan was comparing the older women in his church to our mom; she may have been small and

looked frail, but could she ever pray—powerfully! She was powerful in that area. But, what they heard was ... ‘The older women in the church may not look like much...’

You’ve got to be careful with your words, don’t you? Stan paid for that comment for a long, long time and some are probably still chuckling about it (20 years later)! You’ve got to be careful with your words... As we begin today, let me give you 3 simple truths about the words we are so privileged to use... **3 TRUTHS ABOUT WORDS:**

1. Words are a gift from God. And, as with any gift we receive, we should care for it, and respect it, especially if given by someone who loves us like God does!
Second...
2. Words can build up or tear down. I’ve kind of already mentioned this one; and you already know this to be true. If you’ve lived for very long, you’ve probably been on the receiving end of both. Proverbs 18:21 tells us...

The tongue can bring death or life; those who love to talk will reap the consequences.

So, they can build up (life) or tear down (death). And third...

3. The quality of my life is determined by the quality of my words. This is a foundational truth on which this entire series is built! *How you communicate and your ability to communicate*—both the words you think and the words that roll off your lips—are really going to affect the quality of everything else in your life!

So, what do we do? How do we begin to get a handle on our words? We need to learn: **HOW TO HARNESS THE P.O.W.E.R. OF OUR WORDS:**

PRACTICE STARTING MY DAY WITH PRAISE. So, how do you start your day? What’s the beginning of your day like? Do you have a morning routine you go through (most of us do)? Some listen to music... Some watch the news... Some exercise... That first hour of the day is a magical hour, isn’t it? It’s important, isn’t it? Like the rudder of a ship—guiding the rest of your day. It’s important to you; I know it is ... and it’s important to God, too!

I’ve always been taught that ‘forming a habit’ is about a 30-day process. It takes a good month of doing something over and over and over again to form a habit. But, just recently, I read from ‘an expert’ that forming a habit actually takes as little as 21 days. This is a 5-week series, so there’s plenty of time for you to form life-changing, life-giving habits that you’ll learn during this series—habits that could serve you well for the rest of your life...

One of the habits we all need to develop, as Christ-followers, is the habit of taking time to ‘praise God.’ What do we mean by that? Taking the time, as a part of our morning routine, to ... *thank God for who he is in your life!* That’s the best definition I can give today. It’s *thanking God for who he is in your life!* Thank him for ... what he’s done for you and your family, for his holiness (there’s no other like him), for his being full

of grace (when we don't deserve it), for the forgiveness he offers us (though we certainly haven't done anything to deserve that). You get the idea... And, OK, these are Rom's words about how to form this habit of praise. But, what does God's word have to say? Let's go to that (Psalm 145:2, NLT); here's what the psalmist says...

I will praise you (*How often? Every Sunday? NO!*) every day; yes, I will praise you forever.

So, that's where we begin—to practice starting our days with PRAISE—a good ol' thank you prayer! Next, here's another way to harness the P.O.W.E.R. of our words...

OFFER WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT TO OTHERS DAILY. There is power in encouragement! Just like you never let a day go by without using your words to praise God, neither do you let a day go by where you don't use your words to encourage other people!

Folks, if there's one thing I know today, it's this: EVERYONE NEEDS ENCOURAGEMENT! Every day, we meet people out and about who have this invisible (or not so invisible) sign hanging around their neck that says, 'I NEED ENCOURAGEMENT!' We all need to be encouraged, don't we?

By the way, here's a phenomena you need to be aware of: When you take the time to encourage others, you are then on a path to being encouraged yourself! Did you know that? What's good for others—and your obedience to act on this practice—will affect you in positive ways, too! A win-win for all...

So, offer words of encouragement to others daily. And, just so you know, the Church all down through the ages has needed a reminder of this one. Even the Apostle Paul, in speaking to his church at Thessalonica (5:11, NLT), said this: "So encourage each other and build each other up (one of the ways we can use our words), just as you are already doing." And I, too, would say to this practice ... KEEP IT UP! Why? Because EVERYONE NEEDS ENCOURAGEMENT. Encourage daily, then, and I take a deep breath as I say this one...

WORK TO REMOVE ALL CURSE WORDS FROM YOUR (AND MY) SPEECH. Now, I know what some of you are thinking ... OK, I can probably start each day off with a quick prayer of thanks (PRAISE); I can probably remember to encourage someone each day ... but, 'Come on, Rom, you're getting a bit ridiculous here! You want me to remove all curse words from my vocabulary?

Now, I approach this point today knowing that even your pastor is one whose language still needs to be redeemed from time to time. Early on in my life, I worked in the transportation industry—airfreight, trucks, docks, etc.—and developed some habits I'm not too proud of. So, on this one, I'm right there with you. But, it's important. Do you know why? Because every single follower of Jesus in my life who I've looked up to, this is a characteristic of their life...

Now, I'm not saying that if you clean up your speech God is somehow going to love you more. I've never seen things in a legalistic sort of a way—that way. But what I'm talking about is being obedient to God, in our walk with God, knowing that God is going to bless us by helping us become more and more like Jesus! That's what I've seen in other men and women of God! And that's who I want to be like! How 'bout you?

As Patti read to us earlier (James 3:8-10, NLT), "...no one can tame the tongue. It is restless and evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹ Sometimes it praises our Lord and Father, and sometimes it curses those who have been made in the image of God. ¹⁰ And so blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth. Surely, my brothers and sisters, this is not right!" I will tell you ... I'm better today than I was yesterday; and, with God's help, I'll be better tomorrow than I was today. And I'm thankful for God's grace in all of this. But won't you join me in this battle of words and ask God to help us 'clean it up' just a bit? Let that be our witness to others that God is in the house—that we actually have a LORD of our lives! Then, finally, I've got a couple very practical ways to help harness the P.O.W.E.R. of words:

EXERCISE LISTENING TWICE AS MUCH AS YOU SPEAK. A part of this lifestyle we're talking about today—what Christianity really is—is not only knowing what to say and when to say it, but it's also knowing when to say nothing at all—just to remain silent and listen...

As someone has rightly observed, God has given us two ears and only one mouth for a reason. And that reason is ... so we listen twice as much as we speak. One of my favorite quotes on this comes from Mark Twain, who used his words in this way: "It is better to keep your mouth closed and let people think that you are a fool, than to open it and remove all doubt." And, Sally Berger said one time, "You never saw a fish on the wall with its mouth shut." In other words, you don't get into trouble nearly as much if you learn to keep your mouth shut. Larry King once said, "I realized that if I'm going to learn anything today, I've got to stop talking and I have to listen." The list goes on and on; Google this sometime...

But, let me move now to God's word, where the writer of Proverbs so eloquently says (12:15, NLT): "Fools think their own way is right, but the wise listen to others." This takes practice. It takes exercise of new habits. And today's a good day to start... Here's my final word today—the final way to harness the P.O.W.E.R. of our words...

RELEASE MY WHOLE LIFE TO GOD. This is really the central issue in living the life we're speaking of today. Are you willing to release your entire life to God?

Now, let me talk about a theology of words for a second. And anytime I say 'theology,' that's all about 'what God thinks.' That's what the study of theology is—what God thinks about things (and that should matter to us). The Bible makes it very clear that there's a direct connection between our words ... and the state of our heart. I've implied that a couple of times already today. ... If we have an impure heart, we're going to speak

impure words. If we have a heart full of praise, we're going to speak words of encouragement, etc. You get the idea.

This all comes back to a central teaching of Jesus we find in Matthew 15:11, where Jesus is responding to someone's legalistic comments on diet ... and he says: "It's not what goes into your mouth that defiles you; you are defiled by the words that come out of your mouth." Or, some translations read—out of your heart, because the two are connected...

So, your words are an indicator of where your heart really is. *Have you released your whole life to God ... or not?* Every area of our lives needs to be touched by God or it won't ever be God's intended best for us! We've got to give it up...

The Apostle Paul, in writing to the Church in Rome (Romans 6:13, NLT), encourages us all in this way: "Do not let any part of your body become an instrument of evil to serve sin. Instead, give yourselves completely to God, for you were dead, but now you have new life. So use your whole body as an instrument to do what is right for the glory of God." Meditate on that verse for a while ... and all we've talked about today will begin to make sense. "So use your whole body as an instrument to do what is right for the glory of God." That's what this Power of Words series is all about...