

## Chapter 1

# THE POWER OF WORDS

*A lie will go round the world while the  
truth is putting its boots on.<sup>1</sup>*

—CHARLES SPURGEON

**M**OST OF US understand the power of spoken words, at least to some degree, but it is likely uncharted territory for us to consider the power of *fasting* words, or not speaking specific words. How could this be powerful? Scripture tells us very pointedly, “We all err in many ways. But if any man does not err in word, he is a perfect man and able also to control the whole body” (James 3:2, MEV). There are some fiercely unruly members in our bodies, but God’s Word says that if we tame our words, we can tame our body and mind. That’s powerful!

The taming of these unruly members of our body—the tongue, the mind, the appetite—presents a formidable challenge. However, the truth of God’s Word is, “I can do all this because of Christ who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13, MEV). It is the truth that sets us free. And herein lies part of the paradigm shift that will take place in our lives as we fast words. We move from what is true to the truth, from the seen to the unseen, from the physical to the spiritual, from the negative to the hopeful. We will quit living in the past, allowing our failures, mistakes, and sin to paint our identity with hopelessness. We will move into God’s intentions

and promises for us. We will see God's kingdom come to earth in our midst.

Can you visualize the impact on your life if you could bridle your thoughts and body? This is God's very intention for us, to destroy strongholds of poor self-image, negative speculations, and every thought that is contrary to who we are in Christ.

Life and death are in the power of the tongue. The words that come out of our mouths heal or hurt. They bring reconciliation or division. By our words men are called into their destiny and the life of the Lord is shared with others. By words dreams are shattered.

You see, Satan is always out to destroy the essential purposes of God. Christ's vision for us as believers is that we might be one as He and the Father are one. Christ knew our great love for one another would draw unbelievers into the kingdom as they witnessed something their souls yearned for but could not find in the world: unconditional acceptance and love. Satan uses these other kinds of words that come out of our mouths—judgments, criticism, sarcasm, negativity, complaining, and gossip—to keep this purpose of God at bay.

Words of blessing have a remarkable impact. Gentle words of blessing soothe the inner man. They are like cherry limeade with crushed ice on a sweltering summer's day, refreshing the body and emotions. Words of encouragement bolster the will and activate hope in our lives. Each one of us yearns for

motivating words of praise that infuse our self-worth. They stimulate our desire to actualize the unique potential God has placed in each one of us. Sunny, cheery words are protein to the spirit of a child, shaping the course of his or her life at such a tender age and having eternal impact.

Positive words are verbal nutrients that hydrate the entire being; when lacking, God's purposes are left dormant. Negative words produce verbal toxins that poison the soul. In the wake of negative, critical words, a person's confidence is destroyed and God's possibilities are crushed. Yes, spoken words have the power of life and death.

As Christians we are commissioned to be ambassadors of life to others, to speak blessing not curses. Words that are judgmental, critical, sarcastic, negative, complaining, or soaked with gossip cast a dark cloud on everyone who comes in contact with them. These words should have no part of us. Paul teaches us directly, "Let no unwholesome word proceed out of your mouth, but only that which is good for building up, that it may give grace to the listeners" (Eph. 4:29).

## **A CULTURE OF POLLUTION**

One of the significant challenges we face is the toxic verbal culture in which we live. Perhaps the greatest behavioral principle of life is that people repeat the behavior they see others perform. We are influenced and impacted by what is happening around us. Today's culture is out of control and has no moral compass or

protective boundaries around it when it comes to the spoken word. Practically everything is fair game to say, and no one is off limits to say it about.

The “F-bomb” is common to everyday language and rampant in all venues of the entertainment industry. Just take in the evening news, go to a movie, listen to the popular talk show hosts on the radio, or lend an ear to unsuspecting teens as they are engaged in uninhibited dialogue. What you will hear on the evening news are vulgar descriptions of unimaginable acts, spoken live on television for anyone to hear. Even going for a family movie night exposes one to raunchy, foul-mouthed previews of upcoming films. Turn on the radio and you’ll hear the talk show hosts demean, criticize, and mock everyone and anyone; from the president of the United States to the pope, no one is safe from their constant diatribes immersed in four-letter words and sprinkled with uninhibited sexual overtones.

The vernacular of most young people today is nothing short of shameful. For fifteen years, I was a public school principal at the middle school and high school levels. Honestly, it would be challenging for me to articulate the nonstop stream of vulgarity and profanity I heard day in and day out.

The issue at hand, however, is not the mouth but the heart. Jesus preached on this in many places of Scripture, such as in Mark 7:20–23, where He said, “What comes out of a man is what defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil

thoughts, adultery, fornication, murder, theft, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride and foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man” (MEV).

Yes, the heart is the issue. The Lord is calling for hearts to be changed, made sweet, tender, soft, and able to receive the things of His Spirit. What is in the well comes up in the bucket. The words that condemn us—judgments, criticism, sarcasm, negativity, complaining, and gossip—come from deep within a heart that needs purification from the Creator.

My experience concurs with the psychological and educational research that claims negative, damaging words have far greater impact than positive words. I have witnessed it over and over again in teachers and coaches who bark berating words that attack a child’s self-image. The teacher gets his or her needs met at the expense of the student. Their impact is long lasting—they sour children on education, and their negative effect destroys the efforts of so many other skilled, kind professionals. It is as if no matter how many positive mentors a student has at school, one negative, insensitive, caustic adult can spoil the whole environment for that young person.

Systematic behavior management of children is a major domain of discussion and research in education today. Nearly all such curriculums on behavior management hold the common belief that to correct young people or to give them instructional feedback that they do not see as positive requires you to first

deposit many positive seeds of encouragement to outweigh the one word perceived as corrective or negative. Most protagonists of this philosophy identify the needed ratio of at least three positive reinforcements to one corrective or perceived negative response.

Simply put, we underestimate the greater power of negative words. But Scripture is quite clear about the power of these words, teaching us they are devastating to our spirit. Proverbs 15:4 tells us, “A wholesome tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it crushes the spirit” (MEV). The Scriptures also tells us to flee from the presence of people who emit destructive words of gossip and judgments: “He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets; therefore do not meddle with him who flatters with his lips” (Prov. 20:19, MEV). And let’s be honest: none of us enjoy being around a person whose speech is loaded with complaining and negativity.

Ridding our lives of these destructive words requires dramatic action and dogged persistence. Self-help authors have long said it takes at least twenty-one days of changed behavior to break the cycle of a bad habit. The Lord’s instruction in this and other matters always goes deeper and is more thorough. He’s not looking for a quick or temporary fix. He’s looking for eradication. He calls for a forty-day fast to break the chains.

If you’ve ever fasted, you’ve probably experienced the dynamic power it can release in your life to become free from sin, to pray for God’s blessing on others, and to establish intimacy with the Lord. This