

A KID'S GUIDE TO
THE
POWER
OF WORDS

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Words Are Powerful



Have you ever played Jenga? Players build a tower of blocks and then take turns removing one block each turn until the tower falls. When you first build the tower, it's super sturdy and seems like it would be impossible to knock over by pulling out just one block. But every time you remove a block, the tower weakens. And finally all you need to do is remove one more block to make the entire structure come crashing down.

Our words are like Jenga blocks. We can stack them up, block by block, into a strong and sturdy structure. We use good words to build the tower—positive words, encouraging words, true words. But then all it takes is one negative word to send the tower crashing to the ground.

All of us have our own set of Jenga blocks—the words we speak. We can use them for good or for evil—to build something strong or to tear something down. Our words are incredibly powerful, but most of us don't even realize we have this strength.

God created each one of us and gave us the power to construct or to demolish. And that power is in the tongue. When we speak words—to others, to God, and even to ourselves—we put that power to work.

Training the Tongue

Try talking without using your tongue. It's impossible, isn't it? You might be able to make some funny sounds, but nobody would understand your actual words. Your tongue might not seem very important, but it is. That three-inch muscle in your mouth has the power to make friends or to make enemies. It has the power to make people feel happy about themselves or to make them feel sad. And it has the power to speak truth or to speak lies. That's a lot of power for something about the size of a few Jenga blocks!

WATCH YOUR MOUTH!

If your mom is like mine, she probably tells you the same thing my mom used to tell me: "Watch your mouth!" I would say something I probably shouldn't have said, and my mom would march right over to me with a stern look and say, "Boy, you'd better watch your mouth!" Then, depending

on what it was she'd heard me say, she might tell me to go wash my mouth out with soap!

Have you ever had to wash your mouth out with soap? It's disgusting—wiping that bar of soap on your tongue long enough to show your mom you actually did it. You feel like gagging. It's totally gross. I know I didn't have to wash my mouth out with soap twice—once was enough for me to learn that lesson!

I'm guessing nobody is going to wash your mouth out with soap today, but think about the words you've said recently. Have they been good words? Nice words? Positive words? Make sure the answer is yes because it's easier to keep your mouth clean than to wash it out.

Learning to control your tongue is important because the mouth has a ton of power. You might be playing a sport or excelling in an activity because someone once told you that you had natural talent or skill. Perhaps you're doing really well in a school subject because your teacher has given you a lot of encouragement and praise. Your friendships could be strong because you hang out with people who say positive things and build each other up. A lot of good can come from words that are positive, encouraging, and true.

On the other hand, words—even just a few words—have the power to affect you in a negative way. If somebody calls you “stupid” or “loser,” your confidence can disappear

pretty quickly. You start thinking that maybe you're not a very good singer or student or soccer player. You take the other person's negative words into your own mind and heart, and then you start saying them to yourself. And that's *really* damaging.

The Bible says some important things about the words that come out of our mouths. Colossians 4:6 says, "Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone." And if you don't prefer salt, how about honey? "Gracious words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and health to the bones" (Proverbs 16:24).

What are some words that give you confidence and make you feel good about yourself?

What are some words that make you feel sad or discouraged?

No Small Thing

Choosing which words to say is no small thing. Whether you are talking to a friend, a parent, a sibling, or a kid you

met at the park, your words carry a ton of power. Just as removing one Jenga block can topple a tower, speaking one wrong word can mess up an entire situation. But don't worry—speaking the right word can go a long way to putting things back together.

You have the power to totally change up a situation with your words. If you're hanging out with a group at school and one kid starts making fun of someone else, you have three choices.

- You can choose not to say anything, which basically means you're going along with the mean kids.
- You can choose to add your own insults or put-downs and make the situation even worse.
- Or you can choose to use your words for good. You can say, "Hey, let's talk about something else." Or "That's my friend you're talking about."

Your words have power—and your good words have the greatest power of all.

The best place to go for good words is the Bible. That's where we can find out what God says about different situations, like getting along with others and helping people feel good about themselves. We should pay careful attention to those words because what comes out of God's heart is always right and true. That's why reading the Bible and memorizing verses are such terrific things to do. They give you instant access to the best kind of words—ones that come directly from God.

How can you use your words to make a positive difference in a hard situation?

Say It, Do It

Did you know that if you can learn to control what you say, you can also control what you do? It's true. The words you speak can have a major effect on your actions.

Have you ever been in a situation where you didn't want to do something, but you talked yourself into it? Maybe you were trying to convince yourself to jump off the high dive for the first time. Or hop up onto the back of a horse. Or even get up the courage to introduce yourself to someone else. *Come on*, you might have told yourself. *You've got this!*

What are some words you can use to talk yourself into doing something or to pump yourself up?

You can also talk yourself *out* of things. You want to join the track team, but you're afraid you're too slow and won't ever be able to run fast. You've kept hearing awesome things about your church's summer camp, but you're scared

that when you get there, you won't want to stay overnight or you'll get too homesick. You want to get to know some of the kids in your class better, but you're worried that they will say no if you invite them over to your house.

Remember, when you're talking to yourself, that's also a good time to talk to God. Whether you're feeling excited or scared, happy or sad, confident or discouraged, God will always be there. And if you don't have any words of your own to use, you can go to the Bible and borrow some of God's words, like the ones in the book of Psalms. His words are there for you to use!

Look in the Bible (the book of Psalms is always a good place to start) and write down some words from God that will help you when you're needing words of help.

BIT AND BRIDLE

When our kids were young, my wife and I took them to family camp each summer, and we usually got to spend some time riding horses. If you've ridden a horse before, you know that you can control a 1500-pound beast of an animal with a little piece of metal placed just right in its mouth. If I wanted to make the horse go left, all I needed to do was

move the reins so that the bit in his mouth guided him in the direction I wanted to go. If I wanted to stop, I simply pulled back, and the bit in the horse's mouth brought him to a complete stop.

It's fun to ride a horse that goes where you want it to go, but I sure wouldn't want to get on the back of a wild stallion. There's no way I could control a horse like that. It would buck me right off.

The tongue is like a bit in a horse's mouth. It's a small muscle, but it can take control of your whole life. And if you let it lead you the wrong way, it can do some serious damage to you and to others. This especially happens when you're angry or frustrated and you spout out the first thing that pops into your head. So control that tongue! Use it to steer your life in the right direction.

Act Your Age (at Least!)

Probably one of the worst things someone can say about you is that you're *immature*. When someone calls you immature, they mean you act younger than your age and younger than other people your age. That's not a good thing!

Your words can show exactly how mature—or immature—you are. James 3:2 says, "We all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a mature man who is also able to control his whole body."

We all make mistakes and say or do things we shouldn't, but our goal should always be to control ourselves. And that begins with controlling our tongues. If you can learn to control what you say, you'll also be able to control what you do.

A person who speaks kind words to others and doesn't talk back or put others down will be able to make friends. Someone who uses a lot of positive and encouraging words will be chosen as a team captain or a group leader. Kids who can laugh at themselves and remain cheerful are often the most well-liked. And if you're not sure what to say, just putting a smile on your face can change things for the better.

A mature person looks for the good in other people and situations—and their words show this.

A lot of Christians place a high value on going to church, being in a Bible study, praying before meals, and other actions. Those things are super important, but the one way to know you are a mature Christian is by noticing what comes out of your mouth. The Bible says, "If anyone thinks he is religious without controlling his tongue, then his religion is useless and he deceives himself" (James 1:26).

So watch your words!

What are some things mature Christians might say when they hear someone using their words to bully someone else?

What are some words you can use to show that you look for the good in a person or in a situation?

Just a Spark

Did you know that a huge forest fire can be started with just a tiny spark? Here's how it happens. Someone out camping in the woods forgets to thoroughly soak their campfire with water and make sure it's all the way out. The wind picks up a still-burning ember and carries it into the dry branches of a tree, and then—*pow!* A forest fire starts.

Sometimes a huge area of land is destroyed by a forest fire, and it can take years and years for the trees and plants to grow back and the animals to return. All because of a tiny spark that turned into a roaring flame.

The same kind of thing can happen in your life. Not a literal forest fire, but a fire lit by your mouth and the words you speak. Like an insult to your brother. Or some back talk to your mom. Or a rude remark to your friend. Maybe you only meant to be joking, but your words came out mean. And the other person definitely didn't take them for a joke. They took your words seriously, and now you have a big problem on your hands. Like a campfire spark igniting a dry tree branch, your destructive words are smoldering in the heart of another person.

One cruel word. One carelessly spoken sentence. One thoughtless remark. What comes from your tongue can

cause a crazy amount of damage. Words can destroy friendships and mess up family relationships. They can give you a bad reputation—like a mean girl or a jerky guy—even if you thought you were just kidding around. Even negative words whispered to yourself can have a major effect on your confidence and how you feel about yourself. If you tell someone—including yourself—something enough times, it eventually begins to feel like the truth.

Can you think of a recent situation where your words hurt someone or someone else's words hurt you? What did you or the other person say? What words should or shouldn't have been spoken?

Taming the Tongue

In the book of James, the Bible talks about animals—beasts and birds, reptiles and sea creatures. We're told that all these animals have been tamed by people. Trainers have learned how to tame lions, coax tigers to jump through hoops, teach bears to ride bikes, and convince elephants to place a foot on someone's head without crushing them.

Imagine the size of a lion, tiger, bear, or elephant. Then think about the size of a human tongue (three inches, remember?). And now, think about this. The Bible says that animals have been tamed by people, but nobody has ever figured out how to tame the tongue.

If this sounds crazy, think of how many times in the past

week you've been disciplined or scolded for the words that came out of your mouth. Try to remember any arguments you've had or words you've said that you wish you could stuff back into your mouth. You might as well add in all the times you asked yourself, *Why did I say that?*

Also, have you ever waited until your sister or your dad was out of earshot and then mumbled something about them under your breath—something you didn't want them to hear you say? Yep, that's also the sign of an untamed tongue.

What are some things you said recently that show that you need to work on taming your tongue?

Bears can ride bikes and tigers can jump through hoops on command, but nobody can completely tame the tongue.

Part of the problem here is Satan. (He's part of every problem!) He wants nothing more than to trick you into thinking that what comes out of your mouth is no big deal and doesn't do very much damage at all. But like that spark from the campfire, a few wrong words spoken can make everything—friendships, sibling relationships, your reputation as a good leader or student or friend—go up in flames.

The Way Things Work

Would you ever go to a water fountain and assume soda will come out of it? Or bite into a burrito and expect to taste

chocolate ice cream? That's not the way it works. What you see is usually what you get.

The Bible talks about this idea in the book of James: "Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water" (3:11-12 NIV).

You can't go to a water fountain and out of that one opening get both fresh and salt water. You will either get fresh water or you will get salt water, but you won't get both out of the same place. And you can't go to a tree and get both olives and figs. You can only get figs from a fig tree and olives from an olive tree. In nature, things produce only what they were designed to produce. That's the way nature works.

But that's not the way the tongue works. The Bible says, "Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing" (James 3:10 NIV). This means we can speak good words and bad words—sometimes all in the same conversation. We can say things that help our friends and things that hurt them. We can even talk to ourselves two different ways. We can tell ourselves words that build us up (*You can do it!*) and words that tear us down (*You'll never be any good!*). No matter whom we're talking to, God wants us to focus on the good.

When you feel like saying negative or mean words to others (or to yourself), what are some good words you can say instead?

THE RIGHT DIRECTION

The rudder of a ship is a small piece of equipment attached to a huge, heavy vessel made of steel or wood. Yet that tiny piece of equipment determines the direction the boat will go. In the same way, your tongue may be small, but it will direct your life. That's the way God designed it. Use it well and keep it pointed in the right direction.

Spoken Words

When you make something—like an art project or a Lego model or even a sandwich—what part of your body do you use? You use your hands, right? Imagine trying to make any of those things with no hands. Pretty tough!

But when God created the world, He didn't roll up His sleeves and get to work. Nope. God actually created the world and all that is in it with just His words. He spoke, and that was that.

Can you imagine trying to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich just by speaking? That would be crazy. But that's exactly what God did with the world. He demonstrated the power of spoken words when He said, "Let there be light," and there was light. The land was separated from the water not because God started digging but because God started talking. He used His mouth, not His hands.

And when the apostle John (inspired by God Himself) introduced Jesus to us in John 1:1, he said, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the

Word was God.” Then John went on to say in verse 14 that “the Word became flesh.” When John described Jesus Christ, he talked about speech—the Word.

What are some of the things God created just by speaking them into existence? Write down as many as you can think of.

The Power of Speech

Just as God spoke everything He created into being, we too have power in our speech. That’s because God gave the first human who ever walked on this earth, Adam, His word. God created Adam in His own image, and so Adam was also given the power of speech. Animals can’t speak words. Plants can’t speak words. The sun and moon and stars can’t speak words. Only people can speak words. And while animals might be able to communicate—by meowing or barking or clucking—only people can say actual words.

As beings created in the image of the one true God, we have been given a super powerful tool in our words. Imagine how powerful speech must be if everything you see in the physical world—oceans, mountains, rivers, plants, animals—happened because of God speaking.

And God wants to keep creating in and through our mouths. That might sound a little strange, but it makes sense if you think about it. He will use your words to help

you achieve the plans He has for you. And He will use your words to help other people too. He's excited to see what you can do when you start using your words for good!

WORDS THAT GIVE COURAGE

A member of the church I pastor was decorated with several medals, including the Medal of Honor, for serving in a war. In one battle, each of his men was wounded on the battlefield, and he alone went out to bring each person back to camp. Eight times he risked his own life for his men.

Where did he find this courage?

He found it in the words of his father.

Right before the man left for the war, his father took him aside and prayed with him. And then after they prayed, his father looked him in the eyes and said, "Son, I know you are coming back. I will see you again."

His father had never lied to him before, so when the man heard those words, he knew he was going to come back home alive. This belief gave him the courage to take big risks on the battlefield—risks that other men would not take—all because of the power of his father's words. When you believe in someone, their words are powerful enough to build confidence in you.

REFLECTION: YOUR WORD AND GOD'S WORD

What have you learned about the power of the words we speak?

Who are the people you tend to hurt with your words (friends, siblings, parents)?

Write down some words you can use to build up yourself and others. (If you get stuck, think of your conversation being seasoned with salt or sweet as a honeycomb.)
