

# ENGAGING CONVERSATION BY ASKING BIG QUESTIONS

## WHAT ARE THE POWER OF WORDS

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### STICKS AND STONES

Do you remember hearing this song as a kid?

*“Sticks and Stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me”.*

I can remember hearing and saying those words, and it is odd that even as parents some teach this song to their kids. I think part of the reason we sing it, and for that matter teach it, is because even though we know it isn't true, deep inside we wish it could be. In fact, I think words can hurt more than physical pain, or at least they scar worse.

Take a minute and think back on your life to times in which you have been affected by words? Good and bad? Think of a time when someone said something or wrote something to you and it encouraged you or gave you confidence to try something new or the endurance to stick with something you were ready to quit. Now take a few minutes and think about those painful times when someone has said something that was unkind or even hurtful. I don't mean to open wounds or reveal scars, but I want to make the point in a real and personal way that words have incredible power to build or to destroy.

### WORDS THAT BUILD

Why is it that in the church we shy away from encouraging, thanking or affirming others? Are we afraid that if we do, people will do a ministry out of pride or because they want praise and as a result we are protecting them from sin?

If that is the case, then I think we have it backwards. If we believe that the Spirit of God dwells within us and that we, as the church, are the body of Christ then to some extent when I thank “John Smith” for setting up chairs and doing so with a joyful heart am I not expressing God's love and affirmation on them? Our words are powerful and we are called to encourage one another and as I affirm God working in someone's life or someone serving in an area, I am an instrument of God's love.

Have you noticed that when the apostle Paul writes his letters in the Bible he thanks people, praises them and reminds them that he is praying for them (Philippians 1:1-11 is a great example of this). Even to churches like Corinth who struggled with sexual immorality, lawsuits amongst believers and disunity, Paul starts 1 Corinthians with these words:

Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes,

To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way—in all your speaking and in all your knowledge— because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful. (1 Corinthians 1:1-9, NIV)

Wouldn't you love to get an encouragement card like that?

### **WORDS THAT DESTROY**

Why is it that when we talk about the power of words we always hear about the phrase “speaking truth” to one another without the phrase “in love” attached (“speak the truth in love,” Ephesians 4:15).

I heard someone speak on this and the comment he gave was that every time he talked with others and was harsh, cold and uncompassionate he regretted it, but he never regretted the times he spoke with love, compassion and care. Through my experience, I would agree. I think that when Paul says in Ephesians to speak the truth in love it is because that is the only way that truth should be spoken. Truth and love are not oil and water that cannot be mixed, but truth should always be spoken with love and compassion – they should not exist apart. In fact, everything we say, no matter how hard it will be, should be spoken out of love.

You may be reading this and say: “That’s nice Bryce, but what about tough love?” Jesus modelled speaking truth and never compromised, but he always spoke out of love. The part people forget is that the people Jesus was the hardest on were not those we would consider needing tough love (prostitutes, tax-collectors, etc.) but the religious leaders of the day who were caught up in observing the letter of the laws and had forgotten what God really wanted in his people.

There are times when you and I, as followers of Jesus, are called to speak truth and that truth may be hard for someone to hear, but we are never called to do so without love, compassion and care for the person we are communicating with.

Our words are powerful...they can build the church or destroy it. What makes this even more real is that the church *is* people, fragile broken people, not a building or an impersonal organization.

### **WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT?**

Here are several practical ideas of things you can do to use your words (written and/or verbal) to build up and not destroy:

1. Grab a pen and some encouragement cards and get to work. We each can be a part of building up the body of Christ by encouraging each other (Romans 1:12 NLT). We each are part of the church and if we want to make our church strong, then building into each other's lives is how that is going to take place.
2. Every time you feel you have something to say that is "constructive criticism" do so by overemphasising/over communicating your love for that person and do so with Christ-like compassion.
3. Take a criticism fast. Maybe for the next month or week make an effort not to say anything critical and every time a critical thought or idea comes to you do the reverse - say something positive.
4. Keep short accounts. When you have crossed the line and you feel your words have been used destroy or maybe even just misunderstood, go to that person and apologize. When you do it a few times you will be surprised how you will re-examine your choice of words.
5. Make thanking people a regular part of your routine (individual and as a family) – you will be surprised how your outlook on God and what he is doing through and around you will change when you take time to thank others.

*Like always, this article is meant to promote thought and discussion and if you disagree, it resonated with you, or you were challenged, please feel free to let me know. I am always open to talking - feel free to call, drop in, go for coffee or email me (bryce@devonalliancechurch.ca).*

- Pastor Bryce Ashlin-Mayo