

# The Power of a Word

Good morning everyone. Before we get into the message today, I just want to take a moment and say “thank you” for the outpouring of support that you have given the Smith family. **You have been selfless, generous, compassionate, honoring, and tender towards their family.** I know the church isn’t perfect... but when it works well, there is nothing more beautiful in the world. And it has been a beautiful thing to witness over the last month. Please continue to remember them in your prayers... they are still in the very early days of their healing process.

**A Voice is a strange and funny thing.** In simplistic terms, there are two simple processes that create our voice. **The larynx in concert with your vocal folds produce sound. Then, your tongue, teeth, velum, and lips modify the sound and out comes something we commonly call words.**

What I just described is the physical mechanics of voice, but it in no way begins to describe the impact of voice. There is an old axiom says “**words create worlds**”. That age-old axiom poignantly and succinctly reveals the power of voice. **You have been given the blessing of voice so that you could be the voice of blessing.**

Let’s be honest. It’s tough out there in the world. **We do not live in a grace filled world. Words of blessing don’t seem to roll off our lips these days.** In this world, it is scratch and claw and grab for what is yours. NO free lunch. NO cutting in line. Eye for an eye. Tooth for a tooth. People are angry and mean-spirited... It’s ugly out there.

Like the great philosopher, **Norm, from Cheers** used to say... “It’s a dog eat dog world and I’m wearing milkbone underwear.” So, this is a timely message for all of us.

Proverbs 18:21 says **The tongue has the power of life and death...**

**Every single one of us has felt the power of voice.** Way beyond simply hearing and understanding words, **words have found their way into our spirit and taken root there. We have personally experienced both the life-giving and soul-crushing effects of words.** Through the careless use of those sound waves, our words can

tear down, viciously humiliate, create panic, spread mistrust, plant doubt, destroy a reputation, wound a heart, and spread hate. And yet, that same voice can inspire hope, demonstrate love, boost confidence, express belief, communicate value, provide comfort, change perspective, and breathe life.

**And our words have staying power in people's lives.**

**Be careful with your words... once they are said, they can only be forgiven, not forgotten!**

**The words spoken to us in our past continue to echo in our present.** For all of us, words spoken to us over the years continue to shape our lives today.

## **STORY OF LUCAS**

We are way more fragile and impressionable than we want to admit. There's an old childhood expression that says, **"Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me."** That has certainly not been my experience or the experience of any person I have ever met.

It is mind-boggling to think that air going across a vocal box and shaped by a tongue that only weighs 2.3 ounces could have such impact.

It is not lost on me to **notice the final words Jesus spoke** while He was on our planet. This moment takes place just before Jesus is going to ascend back into heaven. He obviously knows that these are His final moments with His friends. **If you had been on the Messiah advisory council, and you knew this was the last speech He would ever give, how would you have counseled Him to use His voice?** What would you have suggested for this final talk? Perhaps Jesus should give them His three-year strategic plan for His global vision. There had regularly been infighting and jockeying for position among the disciples, so perhaps He ought to hand out an org chart so the disciples have clarity on lines of authority. Since the church would be launched soon at Pentecost, perhaps it would be wise for Jesus to pass out bylaws for how the church should function and be governed.

As important as each of those things might be, that is not what we find Jesus doing in these final moments on Earth. Luke 24:51 says, **"While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven" (NIV). The very last words from the lips of Jesus on this planet were words of blessing.**

**Wow. What a contrast to the world in which we're living.** The order of the day is vicious, mean-spirited vitriol.

**But the current cultural environment presents a tremendous opportunity for those of us who follow Jesus.** We get to use our voices to speak words of blessing and hope and dignity and love. **Every single day, you carry around with you two invisible buckets. In one bucket is gasoline and in the other is water. A wise person knows when to use each one.** In a situation where there's anger, tension, and disharmony, we want to use the water of our words to put out fires of contention. But not all fires need to be extinguished. When it comes to believing in people, encouraging people, inspiring people, and valuing people, we want to pour gasoline on those conversations.

**To really live the life you long to live, you need to help other people live the life they long to live.** And one of the simplest and most effective means of doing that is through words of blessing. "Blessing" is all about the words we speak "to" and "over" the lives of people. **Here's the great news. Anybody can be great at blessing.** It doesn't require a certain level of skill or education. And it's not dependent on your title or position in the organization. The ROI on this is huge. For minimal investment, there's amazing return.

**Mother Theresa once said... "Kind words can be short and easy to speak, but their echoes are truly endless."**

For all of us...

**Sometimes we need others to see in us what we can't see and BELIEVE about ourselves.**

I want to take our last few minutes and show you an example in Scripture of the "power of a word" ... **We find this example in the life of Joshua.**

We read about him in Deuteronomy 1:37-38

**Moses speaking...**

***"And the LORD was also angry with me because of you. He said to me, 'Moses, not even you will enter the Promised Land! <sup>38</sup> Instead, your assistant, Joshua son of Nun, will lead the people into the land. Encourage him, for he will lead Israel as they take possession of it.***

Joshua was to be the successor to Moses. Did you see how Joshua is referred to in these verses... His grand and glorious title was “assistant”. How intimidating would that be? **Imagine how tough it would be to take the place of Moses...** Deuteronomy 34 says... “There has never been another prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face.” He was a once in a generation kind of leader. Talk about big shoes to fill.

As we walk through this season of Joshua’s life, you are going to see the word “courage” come up again and again. Here we find God telling Moses to “ENCOURAGE” Joshua. **The Bible doesn’t ever talk about this specifically, but you just have to suspect that Joshua struggled with fear and self-doubt. Several times we are going to read the words spoken to Joshua... “be strong and courageous”**

There are 3 voices that spoke blessing into the life of Joshua...and there are...  
**3 Voices That Shape Our Lives**

### **1. Timely insight from an individual**

**Then Moses called for Joshua, and as all Israel watched, he said to him, “Be strong and courageous! Deuteronomy 31:7a (NLT)**

I can definitely relate to Joshua. For twenty years I served as a lead pastor and then was asked to **join the team at Saddleback Church** with Rick Warren. I had pastored small and medium-sized churches, so when I was invited to serve as a pastor at this very large church, **I was ecstatic and terrified all at the same time.** I remember having thoughts like these in those days: ***I am in way over my head. What if they discover that I’m not who they think I am? What if I can’t do this job? What if they conclude I’m a poser? I don’t belong here.***

But my boss, Doug Slaybaugh, who was the executive pastor at the time, believed in me. **When I didn’t have faith in myself, I borrowed some of his faith in me.** He spoke confidence and blessing into my life. He didn’t just believe in me, he spoke words of “encouragement” to me. I will always be grateful.

**Sometimes in the course of life, someone will speak a word of blessing that will literally become a defining moment in your journey.** I think that is exactly what happened in Deuteronomy 31.

**I can only imagine how many times in the coming years that Joshua would go back to that moment and to those words of blessing spoken over him.**

In an unexpected moment, I had someone speak a word of blessing to me that became a defining moment. It's a very long story, but after almost seven years at Saddleback, I made the decision to step down from my position as executive pastor. It was certainly one of the hardest things I've ever done. In many ways it had been my dream job, and I thought I could finish out my ministry there. But let's just say I wasn't in a good place and stepped down without having any place to go. On my final day, my assistant pulled together a little farewell gathering in the executive area.

They gave people a chance to share a few words, and everyone was very kind and gracious. But my friend Stevie K. said something that stuck in my spirit. He said, "When I think of Lance, I think of someone who is a pastor to pastors." I didn't give it much thought at the time, but his words of blessing would have huge impact in my life. A couple of months later, through a very clear call from God, I would begin a ministry called Replenish... and that is what I've been giving my life to for the last 15 years.

So, sometimes, a well-placed word from an individual can have far reaching impact... and sometimes the voice that shapes our life is a ...

## **2. Timely confirmation from the crowd**

Not only does Joshua hear blessing and encouragement from Moses, but he hears it from crowd.

*They answered Joshua, "We will do whatever you command us, and we will go wherever you send us. <sup>17</sup> We will obey you just as we obeyed Moses. And may the LORD your God be with you as he was with Moses. <sup>18</sup> Anyone who rebels against your orders and does not obey your words and everything you command will be put to death. So be strong and courageous!"* Joshua 1:16-18 (NLT)

Notice those words again.... "be strong and courageous".

There will be times when God speaks through more than just one person... your family, your team at work, a group of close friends, or maybe your small group...

**I remember years ago, our small group had committed to do a mission trip together to the little African country of Malawi... and we were all going to go.**

And then I got a call from one of the guys in the group who was a well to do lawyer... and he said “I don’t think I’m going to go... I’ve decided I can stay here and make enough money to pay for several people in the group to go.” I remember our group rallying and saying it was way more important that he go than that he fund the trip. He finally agreed and it literally changed his life... He went back several times and eventually become the board chairman for a ministry that works in several countries including Malawi.

So, sometimes God will use a person... and sometimes God will use a crowd or a group to speak to you... and the 3<sup>rd</sup> voice that God uses to shape our lives are...

### **3. Timely promptings from the Lord himself**

Sometimes God shows up and just speaks to you directly.

*Then the LORD commissioned Joshua son of Nun with these words: “Be strong and courageous, for you must bring the people of Israel into the land I swore to give them. I will be with you.” Deuteronomy 31:23 (NLT)*

*This is my command—be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.” Joshua 1:9 (NLT)*

When I read those verses, I wonder... how did God speak those words to Joshua? Was it in an audible voice? The truth is... I don’t know. I struggled with how to share this... because discerning when God is speaking to you isn’t easy. I have never had God speak to me audibly nor have I ever known anyone that heard the audible voice of God. Sometimes I am not sure if promptings I have are just my own thoughts or whether they are God speaking to me.

**But there have been a handful of times where I KNOW THAT I KNOW God was speaking to me.**

**EX—Plane ride to Singapore... help leaders be healthy, holy, and humble.**

So, my encouragement to you is to learn to be quiet before the Lord. Pay attention to those promptings... I believe many times those are God’s direction. Before I wrap up this message, there is one other moment in the life of Joshua that I want you to see. If we fast-forward to Joshua 10,

- Israel's ally the Gibeonites are about to be attacked by the Amorite armies. This was actually the combined armies of 5 kings...
- The Gibeonites send word to Joshua and plead for help.
- Joshua assembles his army and they ride all night and take the Amorite armies by surprise... and they slaughter them.
- The five kings fled and hid in a cave. When Joshua got word that they were in the cave, Joshua gave orders to cover the entrance of the cave.

After the battle, Joshua has them brought out of the cave. He calls his commanders over and, as a symbolic act, has them place their feet on the necks of these foreign kings. **Listen carefully to what Joshua says in this moment.**

***Don't ever be afraid or discouraged," Joshua told his men. "Be strong and courageous, Joshua 10:25 (NLT)***

Do those words sound familiar? **The words of blessing that had been spoken over him have now taken root and are bearing fruit in his life.** He is now walking out the words that had been spoken over him.

**Your mess can become your message.**

Joshua has been transformed. His fear, inadequacy, and self-doubt have turned into strength and courage. And now he is able to speak that into the lives of others. The word of blessing spoken over him now becomes the word of blessing he speaks to others.

**What was spoken OVER you  
now flows OUT of you**

When I left Saddleback, I began a journey of emotional health, soul care, and healthy rhythms. My life was transformed, and what had been my mess now has become my message as I get to pastor other leaders about the health of their own souls.

**So how are you doing at using the gift of voice?** What kind of grade would you give yourself? **If we could follow you around for a week, how often would we hear words of encouragement roll off your lips?** How are you doing at speaking blessing to those at work? What about speaking blessing to your spouse? Your

kids? A good friend? A complete stranger? **Let me challenge you to work at consistently making deposits in people's emotional bank accounts through words of blessing.**

**This week, be sensitive to those subtle promptings. Listen for those whispers from the Spirit. As God leads you, be generous to speak a "word" into people's lives—a word of hope and belief and faith and potential and challenge.**

**Who knows...It might just be a moment that changes the trajectory of their life.**