



## The power of words

My grandmother used to say to me that speech is the gift of all, but the thought of few. As I was growing up I didn't understand the meaning of what she was saying to me. But now I can see how wise her words were.

When was the last time you thought about the power of speech? When speaking, are you always aware that we use speech to inspire, strike fear, dissuade, persuade, console, hurt, disappoint, encourage, educate, censure, exchange ideas, vent feelings, pontificate, argue, thank, threaten, ridicule, criticize, cheer, sadden, curse, brag, comfort, insult, provoke, incite, or apologize.? Before you speak, do you remind yourself our words can express understanding, hate, love, praise, appreciation, resentment, kindness, respect, rudeness, or wisdom? How do you apply the gift of speech? Do you use it to tell jokes, spread rumours, wrench tears, recite poetry, or instill hope?



Have you ever been hurt by the remarks of others? Many have. That's why Pontianus, who was crowned Pope on July 21, 230 and reigned until 235, wrote in his Second Epistle, *"The stroke of the whip maketh marks in the flesh: but the stroke of the tongue breaketh the bones. Many have fallen by the edge of the sword: but not so many as have fallen by the tongue."* That's a strong commentary about the pain words can cause. But words don't have to hurt. They can soothe, uplift, and give support.

Do you realize how much power your words have to make a difference in the lives of others? Let's think about this for a moment. Suppose you encouraged two people today, motivating each of them to encourage two others tomorrow. If the process continues everyday, 128 people will have benefited by the end of the week. If it continues for two weeks, there will be 16,384 beneficiaries. What if it lasted for three weeks? There would be more than two million people benefiting from kind acts that you initiated! But let's be conservative and assume that at the end of three weeks "only" one-half of one percent of that number would benefit. If so, there would "merely" be 10,000 people better off because of your two acts of kindness. Imagine if you were kind to two different people every day! Can you begin to appreciate the enormous power you have to do well?

Of course, the reverse is also true. That is, each of our unkind acts spreads and multiplies just as quickly. Is there any wonder there is so much suffering? Isn't it obvious the world is in desperate need of our acts of kindness? Can we afford to let a single day pass without a kind word? Let's begin to make a difference today. Although we can improve the world in many

ways with the gift of speech, for clarity's sake, let's focus on one issue: encouragement.

### **Plants need water and kids need encouragement**

"Save lives; save kids." writes Celeste Holm, "*We live by encouragement and die without it - slowly, sadly, angrily.*" The number of sad and angry children is rising. So is the rate of crime. To put the brakes on crime, we need to build more lives, not more detention centres and prisons. We build lives by nurturing our children. We must encourage them every step of the way, for they become what we encourage them to be, not what we nag them to be. As they struggle to become responsible, they are sure to stumble along the way. At such times, let's remember that a word of encouragement during a failure is worth more than an hour of praise after a success. If they engage in inappropriate behaviour that requires a scolding or discipline, guide them gently. The purpose is not to instill fear, but to build confidence. As Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe wrote, "*Correction does much, but encouragement does more. Encouragement after censure is as the sun after a shower.*"

When nurturing your children, you should begin by accepting them as they are. After doing so, you then encourage them to become more than they are. William Arthur's words seem to describe how children may feel, "*Flatter me, and I may not believe you. Criticize me, and I may not like you. Ignore me, and I may not forgive you. Encourage me, and I may not forget you.*" We are all standing on the shoulders of others. We have reached our present station in life because of the help and encouragement we received from others. The best way to return that favour is by picking up our children and placing them on our own shoulders. The best friends children can have are parents that constantly encourage, inspire, and guide them in becoming what they wish to be. The only thing a good parent will do behind their child's back is pat it. (And the mere truth is that our children need us to give them two things: roots and wings). After all colours fade, temples crumble, empires fall, but wise words endure.

How shall we use our gift of speech then? In one word: **wisely!**