

Purveyors of Blessings or Curses? 2021  
 Psalm 51:1-3, 6-10 James 3:2-12

Psalm 51:1-3, 6-10 (New Revised Standard Version)

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.

James 3:2-12 (New Revised Standard Version)

For all of us make many mistakes. Anyone who makes no mistakes in speaking is perfect, able to keep the whole body in check with a bridle. If we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we guide their whole bodies. Or look at ships: though they are so large that it takes strong winds to drive them, yet they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great exploits. How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is placed among our members as a world of iniquity; it stains the whole body, sets on fire the cycle of nature, and is itself set on fire by hell. For every species of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by the human species, but no one can tame the tongue—a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so. Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and brackish water? Can a fig tree, my brothers and sisters, yield olives, or a grapevine figs? No more can salt water yield fresh.

For several decades I've dodged preaching this passage from James,  
 not that it's difficult to understand, confusing or that he's wrong,  
 but that his words are true like looking into mirror  
 and I can see much too clearly what I'd rather NOT see. vs. 2-3

"For all of us make many mistakes. Anyone who makes no mistakes in speaking is perfect, able to keep the whole body in check with a bridle."

**Our words are a part of our fallen and corrupt human nature.**

A sermon about mis-spoken words, about saying the wrong thing?,  
 how can I possibly preach such a sermon without hypocrisy? ...  
 ... for that's not an area where I can claim victory.

**Yet our words can be a wonderful and incredibly powerful tool,  
 for consider what the right words well-spoken can accomplish.**

When England was under attack and seemed to be losing during WWII,  
 Winston Churchill's inspiring speeches and well-chosen words  
 provided that nation with backbone, tenacity and resolve  
 against the bombing of London and early defeats of the war.

The spoken word can have an inspiring effect of hope and affirmation,  
 that can encourage toward our best effort, courage & perseverance,

& provide stamina to achieve far beyond what we thought possible.

For example, in his May 25, 1961 speech, President Kennedy  
challenged our nation to send a man to the moon  
and to bring him back home alive within a decade.

He said, the US "should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing  
a man on the Moon and returning him safely to the Earth."

**He captured the imagination of our country with those words.**

And several years before a decade had passed,  
that challenge was met and exceeded on July 20, 1969,  
**as his words brought together, inspired and motivated our nation.**

Or consider the powerful words of Martin Luther King Jr's  
"I have a dream" speech that altered our hope and vision on race...

... I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where  
they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

**He placed a vision of racial equality before the American people,  
that transformed the sort of nation we wanted our country to be.**

Our words can inspire, affirm and change lives,  
encourage and enhance achievement beyond our expectations.  
In your past, haven't there been teachers, coaches, mentors,  
whose words motivated and propelled you toward excellence?...  
... who inspired you to develop your best, your talents and abilities?

What a wonderful gift God has given to each of us,  
that by our words, we can bless, encourage and inspire other people,  
to help them accomplish their goals, to change their lives.

Can you think of any talent, skill or ability you have,  
that was not first noticed & affirmed sometime by someone else?,  
or that was not encouraged at some point by what someone said?  
**Our words do have the power to call people to greatness & excellence.**

I still have a notecard that I've kept since I was in high school.  
I got talked into helping lead in our worship one Sunday,  
to read some of the liturgy and say a prayer that week.

A woman I didn't know, but who attended that service send me a note,  
affirming words and gracious comments  
may have contributed to my sense of call to ministry.

and her kind,

**Our words are a powerful instrument, truly and opportunity  
through which we can inspire and even bless someone's life.**

But regrettably, we don't always use that tool for good & blessings,  
or to offer hope, help, affirmation and encouragement to others,  
but rather sometimes we bring harm & havoc to our relationships,  
with words that cannot be unsaid, for the damage has been done...

... just as Jesus described, Matthew 15:10-11

"Listen and understand: it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, **but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles."**

**Our words & deeds are the product of whatever is going on inside us.**

One time I was playing 2nd base and I didn't just tag the runner out,  
but I hit hard and viciously drove him down into the dirt  
in a most uncharacteristically un-sportsman-like way.

And later, I apologized to Richard, who readily forgave me.

But as I thought more about the incident – I couldn't figure out why-  
why had I done something so harsh and mean toward someone  
that I knew and liked as a fellow Christian and friend?

It did not make sense or seem consistent or in character  
with the young Christian man I considered myself to be.

And then in a flash it came to me.

There was a certain attractive young lady, who had caught my eye,  
but who was more welcoming to Richard's attention than to mine,  
and I realized that the cheap shot that I took at 2nd base  
was really just an unfortunate outward expression,  
the external of some jealous anger and resentment  
that I felt toward him, as my rival.

Something buried deep inside me – a selfish internal motivation  
had leaked out, spilled and overflowed as shameful behavior  
that **had exposed** my inner, hidden and true corrupt self.

Jesus connects that truth to the words we speak in Luke 6:45

The good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good, and the evil person out of evil treasure produces evil; **for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks.**

**Ouch. My mis-spoken words problem is internal, not external.**

It's not so much that my words are undisciplined mistakes or slip-ups  
but rather are a foul gas that's escaping from my sewer within.

James provides a painful picture of what's going on, vs. 5~10

So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great exploits. How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! And the tongue is a fire. ... but no one can tame the tongue—a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. **My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so.**

Haven't all of us, each one of us at one time or another  
let loose with some horrible hurtful verbiage,  
fired off some seemingly witty but harsh biting remark,  
and then later cringed at what we've just said? -  
- and perhaps wondered, where in the world did that come from ...

... which suggests that maybe it isn't something  
I can solve with more will-power and determination,  
by with reading a book, or taking a course or seminar  
"10 Easy Steps to Perfect Christian Speech."

**It's a matter of the heart and soul, not the mouth and will-power.**

**Our speech under stress reveals our inner heart and attitude,**

and no amount of human determination can hold it back, for every now and then it will slip out past our self-control.

As James explains: James 3:2-3 (*The Message*)

And none of us are perfectly qualified. We get it wrong nearly every time we open our mouths. If you could find someone whose speech was perfectly true, you'd have a perfect person, in perfect control of life.

**Will-power and determination are not enough for in anger, from  
frustration, stress, hurt or an ego-driven-agenda,  
shameful stuff slips out that causes hurt, damage & harm.**

**So is there any hope that we can improve?**

Psalm 51 suggests a process of hope and solution,

and it begins with acknowledging the scope of our problem, vs. 3

For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.

It is only when we do accept that we are sinners,

that we begin to grasp and more fully appreciate

the depth and breadth of God's great love for us.

It's when we know that we truly deserve God's wrath and judgment,

and have instead, received God's love, compassion and mercy,

that God's grace is real, is personally significant

and is way more than just a word we say in church.

The Psalm goes on to describe our only hope, the solution, vs. 10

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.

We simply come before God humbly seeking mercy and healing,

and rely entirely upon the promise of God's steadfast love,

as the Apostle Paul describes in 2 Cor 5:17-18,

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.

**For my word-problem and ongoing flaws, I need a new nature.**

I need to become **a new creature,**

as over time I learn to walk with the Lord in faith,

I need to let Jesus grow in me a new heart & attitude.

That new heart & attitude is described, Col. 3:12~16 (*The Message*)

So, chosen by God for this new life of love, dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline. Be even-tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offense. ... And regardless of what else you put on, **wear love.** It's your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it.

I cannot totally eliminate all of my mis-spoken and hurtful words,  
but I can change and adjust my focus and perspective,  
which makes more space for God **to change my heart and nature.**  
I can change my habit & tendency to complain, criticize & be negative  
by looking instead for what's good, to encourage and affirm others.

Our word-power can be used to encourage and offer grace and hope.  
We can tell others about God's love and faithfulness with our words,  
remind them of who they really are, --- God's precious children,  
and our words of grace can help **change our own hearts and nature,**  
as we seek opportunity to deliver **a timely and kind word of hope.**

I can refuse to dwell in fault-seeking and critical-attitude-mode  
but rather strive to appreciate the good **by looking to focus on it--**  
--- so as a spiritual discipline, by my choice of attitude  
for every negative thought or critical observation,  
find at least 3 other things to praise and affirm,  
**and strive to find something good to say that encourages.**

We may need to readjust and reset our life-priorities.  
The command repeatedly give by Jesus is to love God and neighbor.

**Our personal opinion, our agenda, desires and what seems right to us  
is less important or needed than God's call and command to love,  
to express love to that person whom God created and loves,  
who bears the image of God, even if we disagree with them.**

Another helpful spiritual discipline, is that before we speak or act,  
to refocus on what God might be up to or doing in their life,  
**and to ask ourselves, how can I  
be a purveyor or bringer of hope, peace, joy and grace  
in this difficult, confusing, or frustrating situation?**

The point is, be kind whenever it is possible,  
and the truth is, it is always a possibility.

The Good News is that God does not leave us crushed and defeated,  
but by grace moves us beyond our mistakes, losses and failures,  
and with grace in abundance equips us to live  
into a healthier perspective, a different future,  
a future that reflects  
the depth and breadth of God's great love for us.

The Good News today is that we do not have to live and struggle  
under the echo and dread of hurts and troubles from our past,  
nor our losses, defeats, mistakes, or the things we hide,  
for they do not have to power to define our lives any longer...

... but rather than guilt and brokenness, regret and shame, we can  
actually be set free to live & to love without limit or restraint,  
and to fully respond and receive the full measure of God's grace,  
to bask in God's unrestrained abundance, joy & rich blessings,  
**for that is the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit,**

**to change our hearts and to bless us from within.**

Relying on my own determination, strength and will-power,  
our words will continue to offend, cause harm and destruction,  
for we will never change our broken nature on our own.

But as Jesus said in Luke 18:27,

"What is impossible for mortals is possible for God."

May we each one have the faith and courage to pray:

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. (Psa 51:10, 19:14)