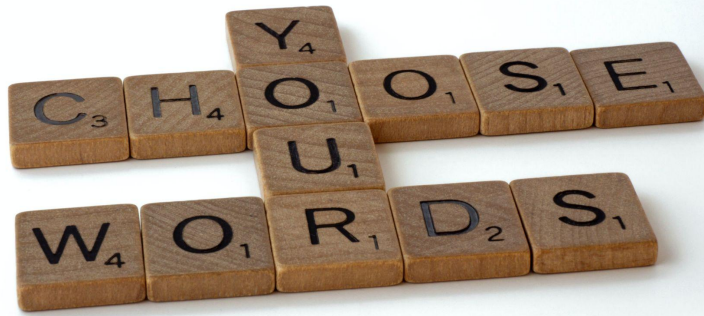


Counselor, Consider Your Words

By Wendy Wood



As counselors we spend much of our day talking. We certainly do our share of listening, but speaking and responding to our counselees makes up at least half of our time in counseling. The book of Proverbs has much to say about words. Words matter greatly to God! Our counselees typically come in due to suffering. It may be suffering due to other people sinning against them, or it may be suffering that happens just because we live in a fallen world. Sometimes our counselees are suffering because of their own sin. Whatever the circumstances are, our counselees need words of life. They need words that will speak truth and hope, conviction and encouragement, and words that point them to Christ and offer life through His death and resurrection.

Proverbs 18:21 says “Death and life are in the power of the tongue”. How often in a counseling session are you thinking about your words having the power of life and death? In some circumstances, literally death is attributed to words. I wonder how many people who commit suicide have specific words playing through their head over and over that were spoken to them years or months prior to reaching the point of

wanting to end their life? Conrad Roy III was an 18 year old boy who committed suicide at the suggestion of his girlfriend. He had suffered from depression and expressed concern over how his family would react to his death. Michelle Carter, his 17 year old girlfriend, responded in a text, "The time is right and you're ready, you just need to do it!" After Roy III committed suicide, Carter was found guilty in a court of law of manslaughter with the jury finding that her careless words led to his death. While this scenario is extreme, do we consider how wounding or devastating our words may be? How might we bring words of death to our counselees?

As Counselors, we speak as a means of teaching, correcting, rebuking, and training in righteousness. There are times when a counselee needs to have words spoken that they will hurt and expose sin and idolatry. In these situations our words are intended to bring the "life" of repentance and failing to speak them may mean someone remains dead in their sin. But, the way that the words are said matters greatly, to God and others. Our aim must be to honor and glorify God in every aspect of counseling, especially our words. Proverbs 10:21 says, "The lips of the righteous feed many". We have the opportunity to give our counselees words that will feed their souls and minds, even in difficult confrontation and in the midst of great suffering. Ray Ortlund says, "The Bible says, "Glorify God in your body" (1 Corinthians 6:20). Proverbs is saying, "That starts with your tongue."

Words matter because God created them to be a powerful means of expressing His truth. God is the God of the Word. God spoke the universe into being. God spoke His covenant blessing into being. God reveals Himself through the Word of Scripture. Jesus is "the Word made flesh". John 1:1, 14 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." God cares about words because He is the author and creator of all words, but His Son is the ultimate Word that reveals Him. As counselors, our words should reflect the glory and holiness of God. Oh, how I fall short of this! "The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life" (Proverbs 10:11). Jesus is the living water and

fountain of life. He is our example to follow, but more than that, He is our perfect, sympathetic High Priest who lived perfectly and died for our sin so that we are forgiven and made righteous in Him. Let's run to Him when our words fall short of His glory and confess and repent and trust in His grace to continue on.

Here are some questions to evaluate your counseling?

- Do you choose your words carefully and precisely so your counselee understands exactly what you mean?
- Do your words point to the sufficiency of Christ for every suffering and sin?
- Do your rebukes and corrections demonstrate care and love for someone who is suffering in their sin?
- Do your words reflect the love and compassion of Jesus, the Word made flesh?
- Do you speak words that should not be said, whether flippant, sarcastic, gossip, or just too many words?

I urge you to commit to pray each time before opening your mouth in counseling. "Lord, don't let one word come out of my mouth that isn't of you. Let every word I speak be of you."

We have been given life through the Word. Our counselees need that very life every time we sit down with them. 1 Peter 1:23-25 says, "You have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; for "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever." And this word is the good news that was preached to you."