

SHARON JAYNES

THE
POWER
OF A
WOMAN'S
WORDS



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The
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MIXED MESSAGES

Discretion of speech is more than eloquence.

—FRANCIS BACON



MY FRIEND CATHERINE AND I set out for a lazy summer stroll through the neighborhood just before the fireflies emerged to celebrate the setting of the sun. We chatted about raising boys, working husbands, and decorating dilemmas. When we arrived back at her house, she invited me to come in and look at some fabric swatches for a new sofa. Before I knew it, a few minutes had turned into a few hours.

“Oh, my!” I exclaimed. “It’s ten o’clock. I’ve been gone for over two hours! I bet Steve’s worried sick. He doesn’t even know where I am. I’d better give him a call before I start back home.”

When I dialed our number, the answering machine picked up. After I listened to my sweet Southern greeting, I left a bitter message.

“Steve, I was calling to let you know I’m at Catherine’s. I thought you’d be worried, but apparently you don’t even care because you won’t even pick up the phone!” Click. I said my goodbyes to Catherine and left feeling dejected. “I’m wandering around in the dark all alone and he doesn’t even care,” I mumbled to no one in particular.

As my eyes adjusted to the darkness, I noticed someone coming toward me. It was Sir Galahad riding on his steed...his bicycle!

"Where have you been?" Steve desperately asked. "I've been riding all over the neighborhood looking for you! Do you know what time it is?"

"Oh, you do care," I said with a grin, giving him a big hug.

"What are you talking about?"

"Oh, nothing. Let's go home."

When we arrived at the house, I quickly erased the message on the machine before Steve could hear my reprimanding words. *Whew*, I thought. *That was close.*

A few days later, Steve called me from work.

"Sharon, have you listened to the answering machine lately?"

"No, why?"

"Well, I think there's something on there you need to hear."

We hung up and I reached for my cell phone to call my home phone. The message on the answering machine went something like this.

(The voice of a sweet Southern belle) "Hello, you've reached the Jaynes' residence. We're unable to answer the phone right now... (enter the voice of Cruella De Vil) "I was calling to let you know I'm at Catherine's. I thought you'd be worried, but apparently you don't even care because you won't even pick up the phone!" (Return of sweet Southern belle) "At the sound of the beep, leave a message and we'll get back with you as soon as possible." Beep.

"Oh, my goodness!" I screamed. "How did this happen! How many people have heard this over the past three days?"

I called the phone company, and they explained that sometimes during a thunderstorm (which had occurred three days prior), lightning strikes the wires and answering machine messages get scrambled. My message somehow became attached to the greeting.

I was mortified. It sounded like Dr. Jekyll and Mrs. Hyde.

"Lord," I prayed, "this is so embarrassing."

"Yes, it is," He replied.

Well, He didn't really *say* that in so many words. It was more like this: "With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water" (James 3:9-12 TNIV).

"Okay, Lord, I get the message." But, unfortunately, so did a lot of other people.

I am amazed how quickly we women can flit back and forth between blessing and belittling, praising and putting down, cheering and critiquing—all in a matter of seconds. God has given us incredible power in our sphere of influence, and it begins with the words we speak. Few forces have as powerful an effect as the sounds that pass our lips. Our words can spark a child to accomplish great feats, encourage a husband to conquer the world, fan the dying embers of a friend's broken dreams into flame, encourage a fellow believer to run the race set before her, and draw a lost soul to Christ.

I invite you to explore one of the mysteries of the feminine mystique—the power of a woman's words. In addition to looking at how our words impact those we come in contact with every day, we'll also look at various women in the Bible and how their words influenced generations after them. We'll explore the power available to each of us to harness this mighty force and use it for good. Most importantly, we'll join hands and hearts and discover how to change the words we speak to become the women God intended all along.

*A word is dead when it
is said, some say. I say it just
begins to live that day.*

EMILY DICKINSON

Are words powerful? Yes! Just how powerful? We'll learn together. Let's take a look at one of God's most incredible gifts to mankind and consider the potential we have right under our noses...words.

A careless word may kindle strife;

A cruel word may wreck a life.

A bitter word may hate instill;

A brutal word may smite and kill.

A gracious word may smooth the way;

A joyous word may light the day.

A timely word may lessen stress;

A loving word may heal and bless.

AUTHOR UNKNOWN