

“You’re so stupid! You’ll never amount to anything!”



Over the years as a pastoral counselor, I've talked to so many people who basically heard this message over and over from a parent or from a spouse. Messages that demean and destroy a person's self worth, messages delivered fairly consistently over the long haul, are messages that would collectively fall under the umbrella of "verbal abuse". It's like the drip-drip-drip of a leaky faucet. Only, it's not little drops of water falling but little, razor-sharp knives that cut deep into the soul. Verbal abuse doesn't leave the more obvious physical scars but leaves deep emotional wounds that can last a lifetime.

Did you know that:

- 1 in 5 college women have been verbally abused by a partner.
- 7 out of 10 psychologically abused women display symptoms of PTSD and/or depression.
- Women experiencing psychological abuse are significantly more likely to report poor physical and mental health and to have more than 5 physician visits in the last year.
- Psychological abuse is a stronger predictor of PTSD than physical abuse among women.*

And verbal abuse affects men too, but in different ways. Everybody loses when abusive words slice their way into conversations.

Such conversations are becoming more widespread socially, as we register higher anxiety as we encounter viruses, lockdowns, and a presidential election. The news and social media seem to overflow with words that put down and attack personally. Division is rampant. "It's Us or Them!" We cry. Our lips are AK-47s.

The Bible warns about speech that tears down:

Reckless words pierce like a sword but wise words heal. (Proverbs 12:18)

Jesus cautions that we will be judged for "every careless word" from our mouths. The Apostle Paul encourages us to "speak the truth in love...".

That's a tall order! How do you find that careful tension between crystal clear truth and a love which deeply listens to the needs of the other? How can we find a way to put down our verbal weaponry and demonizing attitudes to present our truth as Jesus would... or at least, in a civil fashion? How do we transition from words as *swords* to words as a healing *salve*?

If you are truly committed to bringing positive change to the world around you, I'd suggest three exercises:

1. Examine your attitude about POWER. Most of us buy into the notion that the only way to get things done is to force it. We project this onto people too. Our egos manipulate situations to conform to our expectations. God's power works very differently. Look at

the Cross and Jesus' ways of resolving issues. When we change our ideas about power, our speech follows suit.

2. Do an honest assessment on how well you are *listening* to the side you oppose. Can you put the rhetoric aside to hear some real heart issues? Is it possible to align with anything they are saying? Can you feel their pain?
3. Reflect on whether your speech communicates *both* love and truth. Not easy for sure. Do your research on the facts to make sure they're actually true. Check your heart to make sure you are desiring the best for those you are addressing.

Our words and the way we communicate are important. They have more impact than we're aware. Please try to use words that will build up and not tear down. And, always, always, practice kindness.

Just a thought,

Scott

P.S. There are lots of ways to stay connected! Check out our website:
www.LighthouseChurchDrummondIsland.com.

*(From: www.hotline.org and <https://ncadv.org/>)