

This is week two of our series - Small things, Big difference. Last week we imagined what sort of major changes we might need to make in order to see significant changes in our lives – we compare ourselves to someone who has something we want, or has done something that we'd like to do, and imagine that we could possibly achieve it if only we made one or two huge changes. But, what we learnt was that it is not really about making big changes, rather it's learning that it's *the small things that no one sees that result in the big things that everyone wants*. Let me say it again, because this is such an important principle. We have to understand that it's often the small things in our lives that no one else sees that make all the big difference in the things that everyone else wants.

Last week, we dealt with our thoughts, why our thoughts matter so much. Because, our thoughts influence our words, our words influence our actions, our actions become our habits and our habits create a destiny. It's the small things that impact our life in a big way. We saw that Solomon, the wisest person who ever lived said this: **As a person thinks in his heart, so he is**. In order to change our thinking we must do two things:

- 1. Learn how to capture destructive thoughts** - 2 Cor 10:3-5 *“The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. 5 We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”*
- 2. Fix our thoughts on spiritual things** - *“Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”*

And today, what I want to do is I want to talk to you about the power of your words. In the beginning, was the word and the word was with God. And the word was God. And the word became flesh. Whenever God created the world, he did it with the spoken word; our words are incredibly powerful. The bible is full of examples of God speaking to people and through people. As Christians we would acknowledge that the bible is important (although from the little time most Christians spend reading it you would wonder if we really believe it) and we look to it for guidance and support. It is God's written word to the world and God still speaks through it as we read it and hear it preached. What we sometimes forget is that our words are also powerful.

In fact, Solomon said this about our words in Proverbs 18:21 *The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.*

In other words, the words that we speak can be life-giving words or life-taking words. Here's another principle: if you want to change the life you have, you need to change the words you speak. This is because small things in the words that we speak can make a big difference in the life that we live. We read about this earlier. James talked about how small things can make a big difference. A small bit allows you to direct a horse and a small rudder allows you to steer a large ship. He continues the idea by saying that although the tongue is a small thing you can make big boasts or grand speeches or bold claims. A well-crafted speech can encourage people to do amazing, positive things, but it can also cause great harm. We can speak life-giving words or life-taking words.

For example, if you show me a marriage that is struggling, I can almost guarantee that there will be a lot of life-taking words. On the other hand, in a marriage that is doing well, you'll see an abundance of life-giving words. The same is true with any relationship: if a colleague at work makes you feel small and unimportant you find more life-taking words. On the other hand, if the someone that you love to be around, they build you up and encourage you what you find is plenty of life-giving words.

I read an article in Psychology Today called, "The most Dangerous Word in the World." What do you think it might be? Let me share with you a little of the article:

If I were to put you into an fMRI scanner—a huge donut-shaped magnet that can take a video of the neural changes happening in your brain—and flash the word "NO" for less than one second, you'd see a sudden release of dozens of stress-producing hormones and neurotransmitters. These chemicals immediately interrupt the normal functioning of your brain, impairing logic, reason, language processing, and communication.

In fact, just seeing a list of negative words for a few seconds will make a highly anxious or depressed person feel worse, and the more you ruminate on them, the more you can actually damage key structures that regulate your memory, feelings, and emotions. You'll disrupt your sleep, your appetite, and your ability to experience long-term happiness and satisfaction.

If you vocalize your negativity, or even slightly frown when you say "no," more stress chemicals will be released, not only in your brain, but in the listener's brain as well. The listener will experience increased anxiety and

irritability, thus undermining cooperation and trust. In fact, just hanging around negative people will make you more prejudiced toward others!

Any form of negative rumination—for example, worrying about your financial future or health—will stimulate the release of destructive neurochemicals. And the same holds true for children: the more negative thoughts they have, the more likely they are to experience emotional turmoil. But if you teach them to think positively, you can turn their lives around.

Negative thinking is also self-perpetuating, and the more you engage in negative dialogue—at home or at work—the more difficult it becomes to stop.[6] But negative words, spoken with anger, do even more damage.

When doctors and therapists teach patients to turn negative thoughts and worries into positive affirmations..... there's a problem: the brain barely responds to our positive words and thoughts. They're not a threat to our survival, so the brain doesn't need to respond as rapidly as it does to negative thoughts and words.

To overcome this neural bias for negativity, we must repetitiously and consciously generate as many positive thoughts as we can.

Fredrickson, Losada, and Gottman realized that if you want your business and your personal relationships to really flourish, you'll need to generate at least five positive messages for each negative utterance you make (for example, "I'm disappointed" or "That's not what I had hoped for" count as expressions of negativity, as does a facial frown or nod of the head).

(the article concludes) Our advice: choose your words wisely and speak them slowly..... You'll feel better, you'll live longer, and you'll build deeper and more trusting relationships with others—at home and at work.

<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/words-can-change-your-brain/201207/the-most-dangerous-word-in-the-world> [accessed 10.01.15])

Solomon often contrasted to the difference between life giving and life taking words. In Proverbs 12:18 *The words of the reckless pierce like swords, but the tongue of the wise brings healing*. I bet most of us have been pierced before by life taking words and I hope that we also received words of wisdom, because they bring healing. A

positive and encouraging word at the right time is life-giving, it's affirming and it makes us feel better.

Then in Proverbs 15:4 *The soothing tongue is a tree of life, but a perverse tongue crushes the spirit.* Again, here is the contrast - words can bring life, but they can also crush the spirit. I wonder if you've ever had your spirit crushed by life taking words: I can't stand you, you're pathetic, why are you not married yet. On the other hand, I hope you've also been blessed by life-giving words: I love you, I'm proud of you, you're beautiful.

Last week we did a thought audit and today I want to look at the words we speak and give an imaginary mark out of 10

Negative	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Positive
Negative	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Positive

The first line is about how you speak to others: if you speak more life taking words, you know, you didn't do a very good job, your room is always a mess, that drives me crazy, then you would be towards the lower numbers. On the other hand, if you speak more life-giving words, I'm really proud of you, your cooking is amazing, you've done a great job, then you will be towards the higher numbers. Take a minute and think about some of the things you said even today, and where would you mark the scale. Remember, it's not just what you say but how you say it!

And what about your words to yourself? Think about the conversations you have in your head. Are they life-giving or life taking? If you didn't put at 10 on either one then there's room for improvement. **If you want to change the life you have, change the words you speak.** Here are two rules about life-giving words.

Number 1 - **If you can't say something helpful, don't say anything at all.** Paul puts it this way in Ephesians 4:29 *Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.* Do not let any what? Unwholesome talk come out of your mouth. Rather, speak only those things that are helpful in building other people up and that benefit those who are listening. I find that really challenging. What a difference it would make if we only applied this one verse to our lives, to our marriage, to our parenting, to our work relationships, to our experience of church. The King James Version puts it like this: "If you can't say something helpful, shut thy trap!" It doesn't actually, but it should!

So, the first rule is: if you can't say something helpful, don't say anything at all. The second rule is: **if you think something good, say it.** We need to learn to give life to people by speaking out good things. Solomon again in Proverbs 16:24 *Gracious words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.* Notice he doesn't say, gracious thoughts, but gracious words. I can have a great thought about you, but if I keep it to myself it's not helpful for you. But if I speak it to you then those words have the power to give life and bless.

Craig Groeschel, American Pastor and author tells this story: *I worked with a guy I'll call Scott and one day I just felt prompted to encourage him. So I saw him and said, "Scott, you're killing it, man. You're so faithful." And his eyes went down and he couldn't even look me in the eye. He said, "I'm pathetic." And he went on to express all sorts of hurt. I arranged to meet in my office the following Monday, so that we could talk. He came to my office and we sat down and within a few minutes, he told me he was thinking about taking his life. So I asked more questions and it became obvious that he was serious. I was young, around 23, and I prayed that God would give me the words to say. God put something on my heart that I've never done before or since – I took out a yellow pad and I started writing the numbers 1 to 100. I said, "Scott, you're going to tell me 100 reasons why God has gifted you and you're supposed to live." He replied, "I don't have any." I pushed him until he said, "I'm a good writer". I wrote that down and asked for another one. It took a long time. But when we got to around 13 or 14 there was a breakthrough, and he started telling me things through his tears and couldn't stop. He said, "I write thank you notes for everything, I helped a man change a tire, I lead someone to Jesus, people say I'm a good listener, people like to tell me the problems." And we ended up with 100 good things about him. I took the piece of paper, folded it up and give it to him, saying, "I want you to keep this because on this paper are words of life, why God has gifted you, and why you have a lot to offer to this world. And we prayed.*

After a while he moved on and I lost track of him. Years later I was greeting people after the morning service and he walked up with his wife and child. It was a very emotional meeting and he reached into his back pocket, pulled out his wallet and opened it, took out a crumpled piece of yellow paper, and gave it to me. He said, "I don't need this anymore because I don't have the words on the page, they're written on my heart."

I still wonder what would have happened if I hadn't stopped to offer words of life that first-time.

Words are incredibly powerful. When you think something good, send a text or an email or pick up the phone and call. Try and make it a rule to always speak words of life and never hold them back. Every time you think it, say it. And not just for other people, but say it to yourself, because if we are honest, we say lots of negative things to ourselves. King David, who was called a man after God's heart, did this:

1 Sam 30:6 *And David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters; but David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.* There are times when I simply have to pray and ask God to help me or to give me faith for something. Sometimes I read bible verses out loud to myself. Every sermon you hear here has been spoken out at least a couple of times in the quiet of my study.

Every now and then you just have to speak to yourself and encourage yourself with words of life and affirmation, encouraging yourself, not just in you can do it, but that God can do it through you. Encourage yourself in the things of the Lord. Speak things that are consistent with God's truth. For example, God, I believe you want to bless my marriage. Say it out. Jesus didn't say if you talk about the mountain it can be removed. He said Matt 17:20-21 *But I can promise you this. If you had faith no larger than a mustard seed, you could tell this mountain to move from here to there. And it would. Everything would be possible for you.*

In Ezekiel, God told him to prophesy to the dead bones not about them. He had to speak words of life to them. If you want to see it, you say it. You say, "God, I believe that you're going to work in my life. God, by faith, I believe you're going to heal the person that I'm praying for." "God, by faith, I believe you're going to help us get out of debt." If you want to see it, you say it.

If you want to change your world, change your words. If you want to make a big difference in the way you live, make a small change in the words that you speak. Because there's power in our words. Here's something that I picked up this week when I was preparing for today -every time you speak try to ensure that you can add the words, "And that's the way I want it."

For example, if you're talking about your marriage, guess what you don't say, "I'm so sick and tired of my marriage, it's probably going to end in divorce," "and that's the way I want it." See, that doesn't work.

I'm pathetic, I never make a difference. I never get the breaks. My life's always going to suck," "And that's the way I want it."

If instead, you have integrity and you say, you know, "My marriage isn't going well right now. But I am going to surrender my heart to the Lord and I'm going to love my wife as Christ loved the church. I believe God is going to bring healing to my marriage, because that's the way I want it." "I know we're in debt right now, but we're going to learn to live beneath our means, and with God's help, we're going to climb out of debt and we're going to, not only be tithers, but we're going to be massively generous, because that's the way I want it." If you can add that phrase to everything you say, you're going to notice that your words change. Your thoughts matter, because they become your words. Your words matter because they become your actions. Your actions matter because they become your habits. And your habits matter because what you do repeatedly is who you become. And if you can make some small changes in the words you speak, it can make a big difference in the life you live.