



# FOCUS ON FAITH

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## JOINED UP

The problem with writing a column like this each month is that what I write often has an uncanny knack of coming back to haunt me.

In last month's musings I wrote about the power of the tongue. It might be one of the smallest muscles we have in our bodies but it can do a great deal of damage. And so having encouraged us all to think about the words we use, which can either build up or tear down, I began to become aware of not just the actual words that I use but the way I say them.

This was all too painfully pointed out to me by my dear wife, when in a moment of exasperation after a long journey home, I appeared to speak in a rather aggressive way to my son about something that was inconsequential. I say "appeared" because of course I really wasn't angry or upset with him – it just seemed to sound as if I was. Why is it that our spouses and those closest to us can always spot the problem, especially when you don't want to hear it!

**Lies are lies – they don't come in various shades of black and white and even if they did who is qualified to be the arbiter of whether one lie is more devastating than another?**

Naturally I defended my actions – as you do – but it didn't cut any ice. I was in the wrong and had to apologise.

*"It's not what you say but the way that you say it"* goes the old expression (wasn't that a song?) and it's true. The tone of voice, facial expression and body language that accompanies the words all combine in order for the message to get across. Some people have a remarkable ability to be able to deliver the most difficult of messages in

such a disarming and gracious manner that doesn't offend the recipients. Others of us find it problematic to give good news without it appearing to sound as if there's a sting somewhere in the tail.

You see it has to do with being joined up. Our motives when we speak as well as the words we use and the way we express them all have to be synchronised. If one aspect is out sync then the message becomes distorted. And our past track record has a lot to do with it too. A past history of *"pulling the wool over people's eyes"* or of being a practical joker doesn't always do a lot for our credibility when we have to be serious.

Another expression that comes to mind in this context is that we should *"say what we mean and mean what we say"*. How many times have you come across someone who you know is *"spinning a yarn"*? I've heard people say, *"Oh, it was only a little white lie – it won't do anyone any harm."* Well guess what? It does harm – it destroys someone's trust in you when they find out that you've not told them *"the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the*

*truth."* Lies are lies – they don't come in various shades of black and white and even if they did who is qualified to be the arbiter of whether one lie is more devastating than another?

Jesus said, *"Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one."* Strong stuff – in other words, if you don't live by what you say and keep your promises, you can't be doing what God wants. When we manipulate situations to our advantage – and that's what we're doing when we don't tell the truth – we're not just fooling others, we're fooling ourselves.

It really isn't admirable to have a reputation for being *"economical with the truth"*. Sure it may be possible to get away with it in the short term but I've known too many people who've lived lives of stress and worry hoping that their past indiscretions and broken promises won't catch up with them.

So who can we trust? Obviously as a Christian I believe God is totally trustworthy, even when I sometimes don't fully understand what's happening.

One of the prayers in our new "Prayer for the Week" series on the various aspects of God's character considers that He is the God of truth. The Message Version of the Bible translates one of the Apostle Paul's statements as, *"Depend on it: God keeps his word even when the whole world is lying through its teeth."*

God's love and concern for us is so great that He even devised a plan – and promised it centuries ahead of its fulfilment – that meant His Son Jesus had to die. God kept His commitment – even though it must have been the most painful of decisions to do so – and I believe He will keep all the other promises He's made in the Bible too.

What we say, what our intentions are when we say it and the way we say it all add up to how the message is received. Let's be people who others can rely on because they can trust us to keep our commitments because our words and actions are joined up.

If you are interested in finding out more about God's purposes for your life, log on to [www.lifting-jesus-higher.org.uk](http://www.lifting-jesus-higher.org.uk) which provides information on local Churches together with contact details, plus other Christian resources and activities.