

# FOCUS ON FAITH

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## STICKS 'N STONES

I was reminded this week of the old saying many of us probably chanted as children whenever someone said something unkind to us – ***“Sticks and stones may break my bones, but your words will never harm me!”***

Of course the statement is for most people totally untrue because we all know that what is said can cause offence, hurt, harm and even blight someone's life, even those who have the thickest of skins. Reputations – individual and corporate – that have been built up over many years can be destroyed by a slur or innuendo or even a down-right lie. An injudicious remark by a politician can lose an election or lead to a loss of office. Countries have gone to war over assertions, denials and misunderstandings. Huge sums are lost and won on the Stock Market when careless talk lets slip a major deal that's in the offing. Defending one's honour and character often results in lengthy slander and libel court cases and big payouts with damages running into millions of pounds being awarded to the injured party.

Let's be honest – on a day-to-day level often it's difficult to turn away when the office gossip machine is in full swing. Listening to the latest 'tittle-tattle' or reading the up-to-the-minute rumours in magazines and newspapers, is a pastime many enjoy. Perhaps that's why internet blogs have become so popular – in the short time it take to make a few clicks on a keyboard 'hot news' can be spread across the world.

The Bible has a great deal to say about the use of words and especially how we say what we say. For example, the Psalmist says that his tongue is like the pen of a ready or skilful writer whilst the Apostle James says that the tongue cannot be tamed. In the same way a small spark can set a whole forest alight, so one of the smallest parts of our body can be equally destructive. For some of us the tongue is the muscle in our body that we exercise the most.

We can use the words we speak to encourage and build up or to destroy and harm – the choice is ours. Speaking positively benefits us all but the converse is also the case. It's especially true in families where we have the opportunity to influence positively or negatively future generations. Just think of the damage that has been done to children who have been put down by unkind words.

But it doesn't just happen in our homes. I also come across this issue in my job helping people who are facing redundancy. Many of them have been told regularly by their managers that their work isn't good enough, or that they need to improve or have more training so it's become so ingrained in them that they believe they'll never find another job. Perhaps that's why many of us are risk averse – we're afraid of taking a chance because if it doesn't work

out we'll get 'cut to pieces' by our superiors instead of possibly being commended for using our initiative and creativity or for at least having a go.

Someone once commented that whilst the expression ***“What you see is what you get”*** may be accurate in some situations, often it's a case of ***“What you say becomes what you believe and do”***. Words often lead to actions that express our values, our beliefs and our attitudes.

And talking about “What you see being what you get” Jesus made an extraordinary claim. He said that He was the Way, the Truth and the Life and that believing in Him was the only way to have a relationship with God. That's pretty outrageous if you think about it. Either He was telling the truth or the very statement means that the whole of the message He came to bring is compromised.

So how can we tell?

I think most people – even hardened atheists – would agree that Jesus was a good man who helped many people. But this claim of Jesus is one that demands a response – either you believe it or you don't. If you don't you run the risk that you know best and you hope you're right. On the other hand if you believe it, you have to live it out and as we know, ***“actions speak louder than words.”***

This month I'd like us to think firstly about the power of our words – do they inspire, affirm, produce confidence and generally help people? Or do they destroy, criticise and belittle others? And secondly, if Jesus is right and He is the way to reach God, what does it mean for each one of us personally? The answer has an eternal perspective!

Together – as we submit ourselves to God and one another – we can create a beautiful, complex, colourful scene – patterns of behaviour, actions and motivations that bring benefits now and in the future.

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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.