

Our Choice of Words

by Ed Dunn

A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. —Proverbs 15:1

I have a neighbor, we'll call her Brenda, who has a teenage son at just the right age to know exactly how to push his mother's buttons. Over for dinner one evening not long ago, I was caught completely off-guard as I witnessed Brenda and her son get into a terribly heated argument.

Now, allow me to interrupt my story for a moment to say that, when I get into an argument, I believe in rules of engagement. Like the British army of our American history, which fought in highly organized ranks, followed established tactics to gain position, and exchanged measured volleys under the guiding hand of senior officers in command, I believe that an argument should have some order to it. There should be a civility to a disagreement.

Not so for Brenda and her teenage son, however. When the two argued, they were more like the ragtag American colonial militia, which fought with few rules of war in mind. The two came at one another *from all sides, from behind the trees, dense grass thickets and tall wheatfields*, if you will, to extend the analogy.

Brenda and her son tore into one another with a fierceness and fury that showed little regard for order, civility or each other. Let's just say both the exchange and

the dinner were both quite hard to digest that evening.

The effect of such an argument, of such harsh words exchanged so carelessly, left both Brenda and her son reeling emotionally. Both had taken a strong position and dug in deeply. Both had used their words in whatever way necessary in order to win the war. And, after all was said and done, neither mother nor son could say a simple *"I'm sorry."*

Like a sword with two edges, your word can create the most beautiful dream, or your word can destroy everything around you. —Don Miguel Ruiz, *The Four Agreements*

The choice we have to use our words wisely or carelessly usually comes at a moment in time when we least expect it. Often, the choice comes at some sort of an *emotional intersection*, where we are upset and might not be as present as we'd like to be. Our words can just seem to *jump out of us*, and be out of our mouths before we've had the chance to consider them more carefully. At times, we can be completely caught off-guard by something we've just said. We had no intention of saying something harsh and causing such hurt or harm. Before we know it, the *two-edged sword* of our words has been used to destructive ends.

Our words can be one of the greatest sources of healing in any relationship in our lives. Our

words carry that weight. We can choose to say just the right thing, to just the right person, in a moment of true need. We can choose to turn a bad situation to good, and to repair hurt and harm caused by past carelessness. Our words have that power. Before we know it, the two-edged sword of our words have been used to create a beautiful dream—a powerful Christ-centered image of peace—around us.

Words, I do believe, are our most inexhaustible source of magic. —Professor Dumbledore, *The Harry Potter Series*

Have you ever seen someone's face brighten at the sound of a kind word? Have you ever experienced someone's body language, closed and hardened in the face of criticism, suddenly soften, relax and open-up at a word of praise? Our words do indeed carry weight. Our words do have power. In that sense, our words can be like *magic*. They can turn away wrath and begin the process of *healing*. As they are inexhaustible, there is no limit to the amount of good we can do in choosing and using our words well.

As Christ-followers, we have been invited into a life of using our words carefully. In Christ, we are empowered to pass on the beautiful "dream"—the peace of God—to all around us.

We can be direct with our words, and say what needs to be said in relationships we hold dear.

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But, we do so with care, with kindness and with concern for the other person. We do so as Jesus did, as he lives his life in us. When we do use our words carelessly, as all humans do from time-to-time, we say *I'm sorry* and repair the hurt and harm we've caused. We use our *two-edged sword* and our *magic* for good and for *healing*.

As Solomon concludes, "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver" (Proverbs 25:11, NKJV). Our words are precious, and carry both weight and power. Our words can be set beautifully, and given to someone in need at just the right moment. Even if we find ourselves in a heated argument, we can use our words carefully, with an order and a civility to it. The choice of how we use our *two-edged sword* and our *magic* is open to us. Our choice of words is truly ours. □

Ed Dunn is a vice-president at PTM and an editor of CWRm.

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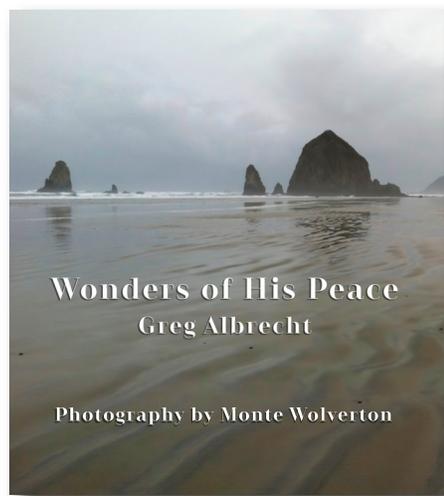
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