

The Medicine of Encouragement

Proverbs 15:1-4, 23 (NASB 1995)

*A gentle answer turns away wrath,
But a harsh word stirs up anger.
²The tongue of the wise makes knowledge acceptable,
But the mouth of fools spouts folly.
³The eyes of the LORD are in every place,
Watching the evil and the good.
⁴A soothing tongue is a tree of life,
But perversion in it crushes the spirit.*

*²³A man has joy in an apt answer,
And how delightful is a timely word!*

Proverbs 12:25 (NASB 1995)

*Anxiety in a man's heart weighs it down,
But a good word makes it glad.*

Introduction

Psychologists tell us that every person you meet walks around with an invisible sign hanging around their neck. The sign reads: **"Please make me feel important."**

Most people never notice the sign. Some people even take a marker and cross it out with criticism, harshness, and indifference. But as followers of Jesus Christ, we have been entrusted with a different calling. God has placed a medicine bag in our mouths. Our words can become medicine that heals hurting people.

The Book of Proverbs repeatedly teaches us that words have enormous power.

"A gentle answer turns away wrath."
"A soothing tongue is a tree of life."
"A good word makes the heart glad."
"A word in season, how good it is!"

Our words can either become poison or medicine. Every day, we hand out one or the other.

The world is full of bitter pills—criticism, anger, insults, gossip, and harsh speech. But God calls His people to become dispensers of heavenly medicine.

Today, I would like us to learn three truths about the medicine of encouragement.

I. Encouragement Calms Angry Hearts

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

We often think strength means speaking loudly, winning arguments, or proving our point.

God defines strength differently. Strength is having enough self-control to answer an angry person with gentleness. Proverbs 16:32 (NIV) says this: "Better a patient person than a warrior, one with self-control than one who takes a city."

A harsh word is like throwing gasoline on a fire. A gentle answer is like throwing a fire blanket over the flames.

Illustration: The Fireman's Blanket

Firefighters carry special blankets that can smother small fires. They don't add fuel to the fire; they remove the oxygen.

Likewise, when someone comes to us angry and upset, we have two choices.

We can pour gasoline on the fire: "You always do this!" "You never listen!" "That's ridiculous!"

Or we can cover the flames with gentleness: "I understand why you're upset." "Let's talk about this." "I'm sorry that happened."

A gentle answer doesn't always solve the problem immediately, but it often prevents the problem from becoming worse.

Biblical Example

Think about Abigail in the Old Testament (1 Samuel 25:33-35). Her husband, Nabal, insulted David and his men. David was furious and was ready to destroy Nabal's household.

Then Abigail came. She spoke gently, wisely, and humbly. Her words turned away David's wrath. One woman saved an entire household simply because she chose the medicine of encouragement and wisdom.

Application

How many arguments could have been avoided if one person had chosen a gentle answer? How many marriages could have been spared unnecessary pain? How many friendships could have been preserved?

This week, identify one person whose "fire" you will intentionally meet with a soft answer. Remember: gentleness is not weakness. It is strength under God's control.

II. Encouragement Heals Broken Hearts

Proverbs 15:4 says, "A soothing tongue is a tree of life." Proverbs 12:25 also says, "Anxiety in a man's heart weighs it down, but a good word makes it glad."

This may be one of the most beautiful images in all of Proverbs. A gentle tongue is a tree of life. Think about a tree. It provides shade from the heat. It offers fruit to the hungry. It gives beauty and shelter. Likewise, encouraging words provide rest to weary souls.

Words Are Powerful

Scientists tell us that negative words increase stress hormones in the body. Encouraging words, however, create feelings of safety, connection, and hope.

God designed us this way. Our bodies respond to kindness. Our hearts respond to encouragement. That is why Proverbs says a good word makes the heart glad.

Illustration: The Teacher's Sentence

Many years ago, a young boy was struggling in school. He believed he wasn't smart enough and was close to giving up.

One day his teacher wrote a note on his report card: "You have great potential. I believe in you." Those simple words changed his life. Years later, he said that sentence became the turning point of his childhood. One encouraging sentence changed his future.

You never know what one good word can do.

Biblical Example: Barnabas

There is a man in the New Testament named Barnabas. His name means "Son of Encouragement." When Saul the persecutor (a.k.a. Paul) became a believer, everyone was afraid of him. No one trusted him. But Barnabas encouraged him and introduced him to the apostles (Acts 9:27).

Later, when John Mark (Barnabas's nephew) failed and everyone gave up on him, Barnabas believed in him. Because of Barnabas's encouragement, the church gained two great servants of God: Paul and Mark.

Encouragement can change a person's destiny.

People Carry Invisible Wounds

Some people sitting in church this morning are carrying burdens no one else knows about. Some are grieving. Some are discouraged. Some are exhausted. Some are questioning whether they can keep going. They don't need another critic. They need a tree of life. They need someone to say: "I'm praying for you." "I believe in you." "You are not alone." "God is not finished with you."

Perhaps God wants to use your words to become medicine for someone else's broken spirit.

III. Encouragement Strengthens Weary Hearts

Proverbs 15:23 says, "A man has joy in an apt answer, and how delightful is a timely word!"

Notice the emphasis here. It is not only the right word. It is the right word at the right time. Timing matters.

Illustration: Medicine and Timing

Medicine that arrives too late often loses its effectiveness. If a person is having a heart attack, you don't wait six months to administer treatment. You act immediately.

Likewise, encouragement should not be delayed. Many of us think kind things about others, but we never say them. We assume they already know. We wait for a better opportunity. But tomorrow is never guaranteed.

A word in season is a beautiful thing.

Biblical Example: Jesus and Peter

After Peter denied Jesus three times, he was devastated. He probably thought his ministry was over. Then the risen Christ met him on the shore of Galilee. Jesus did not begin with condemnation.

Instead, He restored Peter. "Feed My sheep." What a timely word! Those words strengthened Peter's weary heart and restored him to ministry. One conversation changed Peter's future.

Application: The 24-Hour Rule

If God puts someone on your heart and you think something encouraging about them, don't wait. Call them. Send the text. Write the note. Say the kind word. Do it within twenty-four hours. Encouragement delayed is often encouragement denied.

Jesus, the Great Encourager

No one used words more beautifully than Jesus. To the woman caught in adultery, He said: "Neither do I condemn you."

To the weary, He said: "Come to Me, all who are weary and burdened." To Jairus, whose daughter had died, He said: "Do not be afraid any longer, only believe." To the thief on the cross, He said: "Today you shall be with Me in Paradise." Can you imagine hearing those words in your final moments?

Jesus was the Master Encourager. His words gave hope. His words gave peace. His words gave life. And now He calls us to speak as He spoke.

Paul says: "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear."

Our words should dispense grace. Every day. To every person. In every place.

Conclusion

Imagine for a moment that everyone here received a small bag of medicine as they entered the sanctuary.

Inside are three doses:

A gentle answer. A healing word. A timely encouragement.

Now imagine taking that medicine into your home, your workplace, your neighborhood, and your church.

What would happen? Arguments would calm. Discouraged people would find hope. Broken hearts would begin to heal. Weary souls would gain strength.

The world desperately needs this kind of medicine. There are enough critics. There are enough angry voices. There are enough harsh words. God is looking for people whose tongues are trees of life. People who distribute grace. People who become healers with their words.

You may never know what one encouraging sentence will do. It may save a marriage. It may restore a friendship. It may keep someone from giving up. It may lead someone back to Christ. Therefore, let us become dispensers of God's medicine.

As Paul writes: "Therefore encourage one another and build up one another" (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

May our words be filled with grace, seasoned with kindness, and used by God to bring life to those around us.

Amen.

Action Point

This week, intentionally give three doses of encouragement:

1. Speak a gentle answer to someone who is upset.
2. Speak a healing word to someone who is discouraged.
3. Speak a timely word to someone who needs hope.

Become a dispenser of God's medicine.