

Matthew 12:33-37
A Matter of Life and Death
June 16, 2019 – Rev. Rick Lyon

Intro - *Have you ever thought that something was insignificant only to find out later it was a big deal?*

That one little thing (washing your hands) was a matter of life and death.

Proverbs 18:21 - Life and death are in the power of the tongue.

Proverbs 12:18 - The words of the reckless *pierce* like swords, but the tongue of the wise brings *healing*.

Proverbs 15:4 - A soothing tongue is a tree of *life*, but a perverse tongue *crushes* the spirit.

Piercing/Crushing Words

Angry
Complaining
Harsh
Resentful
Negative
Judgmental
Gossiping
Critical

Healing/ Life Giving Words

Gracious
Uplifting
Tender
Kind
Positive
Compassionate
Blessing
Encouraging

I think all of us want to speak **Healing/Life Giving** words.

I don't know of anyone who wants to be known for being:

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- **angry, complaining, harsh, resentful, negative, judgmental, gossiping and critical**

v.33-35

Box = Heart Lid = Mouth

Proverbs 4:23 - Above all else *guard* your heart for everything flows from it.

Kyle Idleman, Pastor of Southeast Christian Church:

A heart filled with *bitterness* speaks *angry* words.

A heart filled with *forgiveness and joy* speaks *gracious* words.

A heart filled with *entitlement* speaks *complaining* words.

A heart filled with *gratitude* speaks *uplifting* words.

- **To fill my heart with gratitude**
- **All I really deserve is to be separated from God for all eternity**
- **Everything I have is a gift from God.**
- **If I fill my heart with that, instead of complaining...**

A heart filled with *guilt* speaks *harsh* words.

A heart filled with *peace* speaks *tender* words.

A heart filled with *rejection* speaks *resentful* words.

A heart filled with *acceptance* speaks *kind* words.

A heart filled with *grumbling* speaks *negative* words.

A heart filled with *thanksgiving* speaks *positive* words.

A heart filled with *condemnation* speaks *judgmental* words.

A heart filled with *love* speaks *compassionate* words.

A heart filled with *jealousy* speaks *gossiping* words.

A heart filled with *contentment* speaks *blessing* words.

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A heart filled with self-righteousness speaks critical words.

A heart filled with hope speaks encouraging words.

v.36-37

Some of you are still carrying around something someone said to you years ago.

- **It may have been something positive...**
- **Or it may have been something negative**
- **You can't do anything right!**
- **You're hopeless**
- **No one could ever love you!**

James 1:19 - Let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.

1. Is it TRUE?

Ephesians 4:15 - Speak the truth in love.

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2. Is it HELPFUL?

Ephesians 4:29 - Let no unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is *helpful for building others up* ... that it may *benefit* those who hear.

3. Is it INSPIRATIONAL?

Hebrews 10:24 - Let us consider how we may motivate one another to love and good deeds.

4. Is it NECESSARY?

Proverbs 10:19 - He who holds his tongue is wise.

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5. Is it KIND?

Ephesians 4:32 - Be kind to one another, tenderhearted...

Audrey Hunt: It was hard not to notice the only over six-foot tall boy as he walked into the classroom a few minutes late and positioned himself in the back row of the *music theory* class I taught at *Moorpark Community College*. He slumped into his chair and lowered his head. This would be his general entrance into class for the remainder of the semester.

As weeks progressed Edward didn't do well. He never participated in class discussions or offered to answer any questions. To my knowledge, he had no friends at school. Sometimes, during lunch, I'd see him sitting on the grass, under a tree, munching on a sandwich and staring into space. On occasion, I'd join him to see if I could start a conversation. I had this gnawing feeling that I needed to know him better.

Edward rarely talked to me or to anyone. He missed too many classes and when he did come, he carried himself like he carried the weight of the world on his shoulders. The more positive interest I showed in Edward, the better his grades became. But the semester was winding down, finals were about to begin and I worried about Edward's reaction to his final grade. He was the last one to finish his final exam and as I waited, I said a silent prayer for him. I wanted to be able to give him a good grade. When Edward finished the exam he looked completely worn out and defeated. As he exited my classroom, I wished him good luck and told him I'd be giving out the final grades on Tuesday morning at 9:00 a.m.

I had trouble sleeping that weekend. My thoughts continued to lead me to Edward and the final exam he struggled with. Tuesday morning finally came. Grades were based on classroom participation, completed assignments, exams, and attendance. Edward would be given the grade he deserved. Perhaps he'd learn a lesson about being responsible for his actions. I felt good about my decision.

One by one I met with the long line of students waiting to receive their final grades. The last one finally left, but Edward hadn't come. I decided to lock up my office and go home. But something deep within continued to gnaw at me. I felt sick to my stomach. My eyes filled with tears. What's wrong with me? I took some deep breaths, sat back and closed my eyes. In front of me lay Edward's final exam. I hadn't decided what grade to give him. I looked down at his exam and saw an imaginary D as his final grade.

I walked out of my office and closed the door. As I reached for my keys to lock my office, I heard footsteps. I turned to see Edward standing behind me. He apologized for

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being late and asked if I'd give him his final grade. I hesitated for a few seconds, then cautiously opened the door and asked him to have a seat.

He looked terrible. His eyes were sunk with dark black circles under them and the hollows of his cheeks were drawn. His swollen lips were cracked with dried blood in the creases. His skin was pale and his hair matted. He was wearing the same clothes he'd worn for the last few weeks.

“Would you like some water?”, I asked him. He replied “No thank you,” as he sat trembling. Then he spoke to me in a low, trembling voice. “I know I'm getting a low grade on my final. I realize I haven't participated in class and I'm an embarrassment to others. I'm lazy, selfish, stupid and ugly. I have no place on this earth and what's more, no one can ever love a person like me. I'm a hopeless case with absolutely no future.”

I couldn't believe my ears. I wanted to interrupt him, to convince him he was none of those things. Instead – I let him talk. I listened with my heart and not my head. I fought back my own tears to manifest my strength and professionalism. When he finished, I faced him, looked directly into his very sad eyes and said, “Edward, your final grade is an A”. His reaction was one of total and complete surprise. “You're giving me an A? Me? Why would you give me an A when I did such a poor job in class, on my assignments, and on my final exam. Why would you do that?”

I said, “You may appear to be a D student, but you're an A person. I love you and I believe in you. I'm here for you and I'll always be here for you.

In all my years of teaching, I have never graded a student this way.

Later that evening I began to question what I'd done. Did I make a terrible mistake? Had Edward played on my sympathy just to get a high grade? At 3:00 a.m. the phone rang. The voice on the phone asked if I was Edward's Music Theory and Piano Teacher at Moorpark College. I said yes and waited. “I'm a priest from Edward's Church. I want to thank you for saving his life today.”

The Priest went on to explain to me the events leading up to this phone call. Edward has an older brother who has always been angry because he is short in height, although scholastically a high achiever and excels in sports. This brother has always been extremely jealous of the 6-foot frame of Edward and has belittled and verbally abused Edward most of his life. This treatment has caused him to have low self-esteem and a miserable existence. Edward thought of his brother as his hero and wanted desperately to please him.

The day Edward came to meet with me, regarding his final grade, he'd left a note on his pillow. It read: “I'm sorry I couldn't be the kind of son and brother you all wanted me to be. All I ever wanted was to be loved. I'm sorry for being unlovable. I'll go now...you'll find me in the closet. I'm sorry for any inconvenience I've caused you. Please have my body cremated. My savings is in the top right-hand drawer of the dresser.”

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Edward wrote that note prior to meeting with me. His plan was to see me one last time before taking his life. When I told him that I believed in him, loved him and would be here for him, something changed within him. He'd never heard those words before and it gave him a glimmer of hope. That's all he needed. When he left my office he felt so good, he decided to take a long walk in the surrounding hills around the music department and re-live the confirmation he'd just heard. He was loved and someone believed in him. He forgot about his plan to kill himself. Meanwhile, his family found the note and went to the closet in his room where they found a rope hanging from the rafters.

We never know, how what we say and the way we say it might completely change someone's life. Edward re-enrolled in my Music Theory and Piano Class the next semester. He worked hard, tutored other students in the class after school 3 days a week, and this time passed his final exam 100% and got a genuine A+. Today, Edward has a beautiful wife and 4 sweet children. He is a successful Dentist in Southern California and donates his spare time to abused children, helping them to find love, acceptance, and hope.

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