September 14, 2014   
Matthew 16:13-18   
Five Love Languages: Words of Affirmation

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Matthew 16:13-18 (New Revised Standard Version)

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”  He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”  And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.

Words are powerful. And we can do powerful damage with our tongue. I was the pastor at Krum United Methodist Church, just north of Denton, for 4 years and the first wedding that I officiated there the couple picked these verses to be read at their wedding. It comes from James chapter 3,“We get it wrong nearly every time we open our mouths. If you could find someone whose speech was perfectly true, you’d have a perfect person, in perfect control of life. A bit in the mouth of a horse controls the whole horse. A small rudder on a huge ship in the hands of a skilled captain sets a course in the face of the strongest winds. A word out of your mouth may seem of no account, but it can accomplish nearly anything—or destroy it! It only takes a spark, remember, to set off a forest fire. A careless or wrongly placed word out of your mouth can do that. By our speech we can ruin the world, turn harmony to chaos, throw mud on a reputation, send the whole world up in smoke and go up in smoke with it, smoke right from the pit of hell. This is scary: You can tame a tiger, but you can’t tame a tongue—it’s never been done. The tongue runs wild, a wanton killer. With our tongues we bless God our Father; with the same tongues we curse the very men and women God made in God’s image. Curses and blessings out of the same mouth!”

I had never read those words at a wedding, but the couple said that they had learned the power of words and that these verses were a reminder to them of how they wanted to speak to each other. This was also the first wedding I had been to where the groom and all of his groomsmen came out in blue jeans that were so starched they could have stood up on their own. And then in Denton I started to notice at the dry cleaners that folks were taking their jeans to the dry cleaner to get starched!

Anyway, we are going to spend the next few weeks talking about all of the love languages that Gary Chapman talks about in his book, The Five Love Languages. He raises up five: words of affirmation, receiving gifts, acts of service, physical touch, and quality time. Chapman says that we all experience and communicate love differently. Everyone has one or two of the five love languages that we primarily identity with.

Here’s how it plays out: A dad works long hours to provide everything his son could possibly want. The son just wants to spend time with his dad. The dad loves the son but the son doesn’t receive it because they’re speaking two different love languages. They might as well be speaking Japanese and German. The dad is showering the kid with gifts, but the kid feels most loved when someone spends quality time with him. If you do not know your love language, I want to encourage you to go online to [www.5lovelanguages.com](http://www.5lovelanguages.com) and take a quick quiz. And the hope is that by talking about each of the love languages we will better be able to love.

We are a people saved by grace who are called to love. Our life is a gift to God and we are called to love one another, to respect all people, to share with those in need. So, today we talk about words of affirmation. Actions don’t always speak louder than words. If this is your love language, unsolicited compliments mean the world to you. Hearing the words, “I love you,” are important—hearing the reasons behind that love sends your spirits skyward. And insults can leave you shattered and are not easily forgotten.

Words are important because they are powerful and creative. With mere words, God spoke all creation into being. Jesus is the Word of God made flesh. With words we pray to God, with words we ask Jesus into our heart as we begin the journey of being a follower of the Christ.

Words of Affirmation are inspiring and encouraging. How many of you have been inspired by the words of a teacher or coach? Felt encouraged at just the right time by the words of a trusted friend? How many of you have a letter or a card you have saved because the words made you feel loved and special.

Psychologist William James said that possibly the deepest human need is the need to feel appreciated. In our scripture today Jesus asks his disciples, who do people say that I am and who do you say that I am? What we say about another person, how we name that person, creates perception. Perception has the power to create reality. Remember how Ms. Aibileen in The Help kept speaking words of affirmation to little Skeeter. “You is kind. You is smart. You is important.” She was naming the child. That little girl believed those words and then lived them as an adult.[[1]](#footnote-2)

When we use words of affirmation we are communicating, “I know. I care. I am with you and for you.” We are trying to show that we believe in them and their abilities. We are giving credit and praise. Most of us have more potential than we will ever develop. What holds us back is often a lack of courage.

We give words of affirmation in four ways: compliments, encouragement, kind words, and praise. Mark Twain once said, “I can live for two months on a good compliment.” I don’t know about you, but I need compliments more often than that. Or encouragement, how do you feel when someone says, “I’m proud of you” or “You’re going to do great on that test.” Building courage through words of affirmation.

And kind words are about the tone we use when we speak. Which request do you think would be better received as love?

Number one: Could you make that yummy soup again?

Number two: When are we going to have a decent meal around here? In loving others, it’s not just about what we say, but how we say it. Praise  acknowledges effort and accomplishment.

Dr. Chapman writes, “Life’s deepest meaning is not found in accomplishments, but in relationships.” What God most desires from us is a relationship. That relationship is not based on what we can do, but just the fact that God loves us. What would happen to the emotional climate of a household, a workplace, a neighborhood, a congregation, if people heard words of affirmation regularly? What would happen if we lived Jesus’ command to love one another and shared what we have found?

You the people of Greenland Hills make my heart smile when you say a word of affirmation to our incredible choir or our gifted music ministry staff, Kristi and Robert. You the people of Greenland Hills make my heart smile when you bring your children and youth to Sunday School and Confirmation and youth group so that they can receive a word of affirmation from adults who are not their parents. You the people of Greenland Hills make my heart smile when you volunteer with Emanuel Community Center on Tuesday mornings and you treat those who are coming for food like they are family. You the people of Greenland Hills make my heart smile when you tell others about this wonderful community of faith and invite them to come to church with you.

I want to challenge us all this week to make a list of the things we love about your spouse, your children, your co-workers, or your friends. And then this week use words of affirmation to your spouse, your children, your co-workers, or your friends in front of others. Compliments, encouragement, kind words, and praise affirm another person’s self-worth. We are creating intimacy and healing wounds. Now, we go and practice!

1. http://pastorblog.cumcdebary.org/?p=5480 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)