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Women of Witness

TIPS TO BETTER YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHERS

The Power of Our Words

By Dr. Kathy Koch

The words we say and the words we don't say change lives. Take a moment and read that again. The words we say and the words we don't say change lives. Do you agree?

Who has spoken to you in this life-changing way? What did they say? Perhaps you stood across from the love of your life and heard, "I do." Or maybe you've heard, "We're moving again," or "You'll never amount to anything!" Words have power. God can use them to change the direction of a life.

What about words that were *not* spoken? Perhaps you haven't heard something positive that you'd still like to hear. An apology? An "I love you," "I'm here for you," or "You're special to me?"

Or maybe, like me, you realize negative words could have been spoken and you're grateful they weren't.

When I was about six years old, I told my mom I didn't want to be tall or clumsy anymore. I was a very tall little girl crying out to my mom for help. I remain grateful that she heard my heart-cry. As a result, she didn't say what I fear too many parents might have.

My mom's response could have been, "Get over it! You're going to be tall." Or, she could have tried to convince me that it's great being tall. But she didn't. Both responses would have been disrespectful. Instead, she responded with empathy to my frustrations. And, later that night, she problem-solved with my dad.

Within the week, they enrolled me in tap dance class. I thrived! Not only did I learn grace and to be comfortable with my body image, but I was the only one who could be the center of the back row. It was reserved for the tallest girl – and that was me. I decided it was a position of high honor!

I'm convinced the words my mom did *not* say changed my life. A flippant response would have suggested to me that I shouldn't be concerned about my height or my clumsiness. Therefore, I don't think I would have brought it up again and I would have remained uncomfortable with my body image. As a result, I doubt I'd want to stand before thousands of people as a public speaker.

Can I really connect my mom's long-ago; empathetic, quiet response to the speaking ministry God has given me today? Absolutely. What about my parents' problem-solving approach?

Absolutely.

By the way, it *is* great being tall. When I taught second graders, I could hang things from the ceiling without using a ladder. When I fly overseas, I can easily get my carry-on luggage into the overhead bins. Also, when speaking at conferences, my height makes it easier for everyone to see me. I often tell children that I'm glad I lived long enough to find out why God made me the way He did. I challenge them to stay alive to discover their hidden strengths, and to ask God to show them why they are the way they are.

When I was six and uncomfortable with my height, I'm glad my mom didn't try reasoning with me. I didn't want her thoughts; I wanted her feelings. I initially didn't want to hear her opinion that it was okay being tall. I just wanted her to know mine. I was living in the moment and at that moment I was miserable. I doubt she could have convinced me that there were advantages to being tall.

I truly wish more moms and dads would hear their children's hearts, and not just their words. When we respond first to their heart-cries, they'll receive instruction we offer later. And, when we respond to their hearts, they'll typically talk more. These additional details can provide us with valuable information to use when problem-solving.

Words not spoken change lives. We can just listen, perhaps while holding our children. Being quiet, which can encourage them to keep talking, is an appropriate response when our silence is accompanied by encouraging body language. Just stand in your child's bedroom doorway after saying good night. With this distance and in the dark, many kids will now talk about important feelings, ideas, and happenings. Going for a walk, doing chores together, and just hanging out all "speak" volumes. Our availability can keep the dialogue going. That's a key.

We can also look at my illustration this way: I felt safe being honest with my mom. If I couldn't have told her that I didn't want to be tall and clumsy anymore, my parents wouldn't have been able to help me. They wouldn't have known to. If my lack of self-acceptance had continued, perhaps my entire childhood would have been negatively affected. Could that have influenced my adult years?

Absolutely.

So, the words I spoke changed my life, too.

Are your children free to come to you with their heartaches and questions? Can they honestly speak life-changing words? If they can, praise God! If they can't, what needs to change?

How do you typically respond when children come to you? Do you affirm them when you can? Ask clarifying questions? Send them away because it's an inconvenient time? Listen for what they're *really* saying? Encourage or discourage? Build up or tear down? Interrogate? Offer empathy? Problem-solve? Jump to conclusions? Dismiss their feelings?

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