

***What Are You Telling Yourself?***  
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Today's scripture passages highlight the importance that words play in our lives. According to the Bible, words can either be as sweet as honey or they can turn into a forest fire destroying everything in their path. In other words, we need to pay special attention to how we speak and what we say because our words have consequences. Simply said; "***Choose your words wisely!***"

So, in order to delve into the importance words, have for our lives let's explore some fun facts together. How many words do you speak daily?

The average number of words spoken by men and women is about 16,000/day. That's a lot of words! Granted some people speak more than others and if you are like me I was taught an urban legend awhile back that claimed that women speak approximately twice as many words as men, but this isn't true. Research shows that men and woman are about on par with each other so there really isn't a major difference gender wise.

Since we talk a lot, about 16k words let me ask you a question-

Who is the person with whom you talk the most? Think about that with me for a moment; is the person your spouse, a friend, perhaps a co-worker who is that person you talking to the most?

Who did you identify; spouse, child, friend, co-worker, or other?

Now I want to share a different set of fun facts that might swing your answer in a new direction. Did you know that you have close to 50 thoughts a minute? That's almost one thought every second and when added up, the fact of the matter is you and I have approximately 70,000 thoughts per day!!! That's about 4 ½ more thoughts than words so know we have zeroed in on the person you talk to the most.

Believe it or not, the person you talk to the most in your life is actually; YOU!

How many of you would agree with me that most of the time we are living in our heads? Fact is you are thinking about what I'm saying, whether you agree or not, without saying so with words. So much is going on up here that the rest of the world doesn't see, but these oh so private thoughts actually direct our behavior.

Some would say that our thoughts are what make us distinctly human. Remember how the philosopher Descartes put so succinctly what it means to be a human self: "***I think therefore I am! I think therefore I am!***"

To be a self is to be directed by our thoughts. Before we had the technology of the functional MRI machines the theory of Homunculus was popular. Have you ever heard of Homunculus? Well he was like a little human sitting at a control panel in our heads pulling levers to get our bodies moving in this direction and that.

Before Homunculus, Plato thought of the self as a charioteer who was steering a chariot being pulled by two horses; one horse being the mind, while the other horse being our bodies. Plato's charioteer illuminates that there are conflicts going on inside of our selves which must be directed and redirected by force otherwise we go out of balance.

Face it, our thoughts shape both how we see ourselves, how we move in our world and the conflicts that arise within us as we attempt to navigate this life of ours.

I like the story of the Cherokee grandfather who was teaching his grandchildren how to understand the conflicted thoughts and behaviors which shape our souls.

***“There’s a fight going on inside of me, he told his grandchildren. It’s a terrible fight between two wolves. One is evil, angry, critical, inferior, and full of malice. The other is good, filled with joy, peace, hope and compassion. The same fight is going on in you and in every other person too.***

***One of the grandsons asked his grandfather, “Which wolf will win?”***

***The wise grandfather replied simply, but profoundly: “the one you feed.”***

***The one you feed.*** When we put our minds to it, the thoughts we choose to focus on determine how we behave ***so choose your thoughts wisely.***

Combine the Cherokee grandfather's lesson that the person you become depends on which wolf you feed with Descartes' wisdom of ***“I think; therefore, I am,”*** and you can see the importance our thoughts have in shaping us. How we talk to ourselves, what we think about me, myself, and I depend on what type of thoughts we feed ourselves. Our thoughts just like our words can either be as sweet as healing honey or a forest fire that destroys everything in its path.

***So, what are you telling yourself? What are the thoughts that direct your actions? What we say to ourselves is just as important as what we say to other people so what are you telling yourself?***

That's the title of today's sermon. What type of self-talk is your primary diet that feeds your soul and guides your movement throughout your life?

If we're honest we have that battle going on inside of us, the battle that the Cherokee grandfather spoke of with his grandchildren and with us. We have a diet of conflicted thoughts that run the gamut of positive, the honey thoughts you might say to negative forest fire thoughts and truth be told the negative thoughts seem to capture our attention and hold it more than the positive thoughts.

Have you ever wondered why; why we focus more on negative thoughts?

Neuroscientists believe that our brains have what is called a ***negative bias*** which is a built-in protection mechanism or said differently a survival mechanism. We pay closer attention to whatever is painful in order to protect ourselves. You can have a positive thought, but we listen really listen to the negative because it creates pain.

Think about a report card or a job review. Each has four really great affirmations about your accomplishments, but each also has a “*could improve*” comment or two. Which do you think will receive your attention? You got it! The negative and it shows up as a voice, an inner voice inside of your head.

This voice that most of us have developed through practice, practice, practice is what is not so affectionately known as the **inner critic**. The inner critic is that voice that shows up when you are feeling anxious. You know that one, don't you?!!

The inner critic uses words like *not* and *can't*.

*I'm not good enough to make the team or get the promotion.*

*I can't stand out because I'm not good enough.*

*I'm not smart enough, not pretty enough, I'm just not enough so I can't!!!*

Sound familiar? We all have a very skilled internal critic who has been feeding us a line most of our lives. When we are feeling anxious about a situation, or about another person and especially about ourselves, the *inner critic* shows up in order to keep us in our place, to protect us, and ultimately limit how we participate in this wonderful life that God has blessed us with. Before you know it, you have created a forest fire in your head that seems to consume your thoughts like a fire consumes oxygen.

*So, what can you do when our inner critic is telling you that you aren't good enough, not good looking enough or not smart enough?* Since we pay closer attention to negatives, how can we break the spell?

Is it even possible? I'm reminded of a skit back in the day that poked fun at our attempts to use positive affirmations to reverse the effects of the *inner critic*.

Do you remember the Saturday Night Live skit featuring a character named Stuart Smiley? Stuart was played by Al Franken and he was this dorky looking guy dressed in a sweater and low self-esteem. To silence his inner critic, Stuart would sit in front of a mirror and rather than ask the question “*mirror, mirror on the wall, who's the fairest one of all?*” Stuart would speak to himself with positive affirmations. This is what he said, “*I'm good enough, I'm smart enough, and doggone it, people like me!*”

The sad fact is, we, his audience, were critical of Stuart and his affirmations.

So is it possible to quell the inner critic.

I think it is. I know that positive self-affirmations are helpful, but I think they are more powerful when combined with the words of faith. God's word is like honey to us; sweet to the taste and healing to the bone. In fact, God's word is what provides true protection and therefore strength to our daily lives; granting us **the faith** needed to face our anxieties, the hope that *whatever situation we find ourselves in* will work out and **the courage** to move forward when our inner critic warns us to hold back.

Let me suggest a litany of faithful self-talk which helps to tame the negative tongue of our inner critic and feed the good wolf of which the wise Cherokee grandfather spoke.

This morning we began worship like we do most Sundays with these honey-like words:

***“This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it!”*** Psalm 118:24

Positive Message- The day with all its concerns, trials, and uncertainties is made by God so no matter what we make of the day God’s will shall be done.

***“I can do all this through him who gives me strength”*** Philippians 4:13

Positive Message- God grants you and me the strength to face our challenges no matter how great, and some are very great.

***“Blessed are those who mourn; they shall be comforted!”*** Matthew 5:4.

Positive Message- When you allow yourself to grieve, God will comfort you in your sorrows and hold you and support you when the tsunami wave of grief washes over you.

***“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”*** Romans 8:28

Positive Message-God is working for your good today! In the negativity of the moment which hijacks your mind to think everything is going wrong, the opposite is true. In the trials of the day, God is working good for us!

***“You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.”*** Psalm 16:11

Positive Message- I can know the joy of God’s presence as I walk through this day!

***What are you telling yourself?***

It’s like the ole grandfather said, ***“There’s a great battle going on inside of us,”*** and I dare say it’s a battle most of us fight daily. So, help your mind feed the good wolf, why not feed your mind a steady diet of God’s word-

***“God made this day, so I will be glad. God is with me in working for my good in all situations. When I feel weak, God will strengthen me and when I feel sad God will provide me with comfort!”***

***Above all; “God is Love.”***

***Amen.***