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Words have power!

Vivian Bussinguer-Khavari

Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.

Proverbs 4:23

Introduction

This past week Osaka experienced a strong earthquake that shook many of our homes in the Kansai region. On the same day, I lost a dear friend and mentor, who had been battling with cancer. It has been quite challenging, but I have also been taking the time to think about what is really important in life. The death of a dear one can act as a reminder of how fragile life really is, giving us an opportunity to reflect on how we want to live our life.

We must not take life for granted! This past week, I have been thinking: *How will I choose to live my life?* Today, I would like to ask you: *How would you like to live your life?* The truth is that one day, just like my dear friend, we will all be gone. It is only a matter of time. Therefore, how we live our life is most significant. What legacy do we wish to leave behind?

The theme of this month's chapel is 「私にとって大切なことば」 and it has gotten me thinking about 「ことば」 or *words*. Words are extremely important! They are important to me, they are important to you, and they are important to human kind. Words are so powerful!

The Mouth

The mouth is a very important part of our body. It is with our mouth that we breathe, eat, smile, laugh, sing, talk, thank, apologize, encourage, praise, etc. On the other hand, it is also with our mouth that we curse, swear, complain, attack, judge, yell, and discourage others.

Is it not delightful to receive a smile, to be appreciated, to be shown love? Think about the time someone said something really kind to you, paid you a compliment, encouraged you, gave

you hope, told you you were good at something, recognized your efforts and talents . . . I am sure you can think of someone who has blessed you with uplifting, encouraging, and positive words.

Now, think of the opposite. Someone has said something mean. They have shown their anger and frustration in their words. They might have called you names, told you that your dream is impossible, that you are not capable, that you do not have what it takes . . . Some of these negative words might have been thrown at you a very long time ago, but you still carry them around. You still keep them in your memory. Negative words have formed a scar in your heart. Why? Simply because words have power!

In today's fast-paced society, in which so much has been digitalized and so many meaningful social interactions are no more, positive and encouraging words are often lacking as well. People often go around complaining, feeling frustrated and tired. In a sense, our society has not developed into a nourishing place where people get support through words of affirmation. In many situations, people have even created their own ways of affirming themselves. In Japanese, terms such as 「やった！」 or 「よっしゃ！」 or 「行くぞう！」 are some examples of what people might say out loud (to

themselves) in order to receive enough energy and encouragement to continue moving forward.

Words are powerful. If you keep telling yourself 「しんどい！」 it will surely be so, but if you choose to replace such negative words with positive ones, they can have a positive effect on you.

The mouth is a tool. We can use it for good, or we can use it for evil. It is like a stamp or the Japanese personal seal known as 印鑑. You can use it to sign a marriage certificate or you can use to file for a divorce. A judge can use it to imprison someone or to set a prisoner free.

The Bible teaches something very important about the mouth. Ephesians 4:29 says: *Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.*

Our mouths speak our thoughts, both conscious and unconscious ones. Sometimes, we say things that are bad or hurtful to others. We make mistakes. The truth is that we are imperfect human beings. But why is it that so much evil can actually come out of our mouths? Below is what the Bible has to say . . .

The Heart

When Jesus Christ walked on Earth, there were many Pharisees, or teachers of the law, who were educated, influential and quite careful about following the law. However, they were arrogant, quick to judge, picky about others' behaviors and proud about their knowledge and prestige. On the outside, they looked holy and their behavior seemed pleasing to God. But on the inside, they were unclean and their hearts were not in the right place.

One time, they questioned Jesus about the ritual of washing hands, criticizing Jesus for not washing hands properly, but in response, Jesus said: *Listen and understand. What goes into someone's mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that defiles them. (Matthew 15:10)* Later, Jesus explained in more details by telling them: *Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. (Matthew 15:17-18)*

What was Jesus saying? In an attempt to understand his words better, let us consider the following illustrations. When you take a shower, you wash away the dirt on your body and you never see it again. Or after eating

a meal and receiving nutrition from it, your body gets rid of the waste it does not need. The dirt outside your body and the waste inside your body both get washed away and do not necessarily cause you lasting harm. You let the dirt and waste go and you forget about them. On the other hand, when someone uses their mouth to say something evil, to judge you or attack you, you cannot easily forget it. You cannot easily let go. It stays with you for years to come. It creates a scar in your heart. In the same way, you can permanently hurt someone when you say something negative or unkind.

Jesus explains that if our mouths are producing something bad, negative or hurtful, it is because our hearts need repair. Therefore, in order to avoid doing so, we must guard our hearts. Proverbs 4:23 says: *Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.*

Conclusion

How do we guard our hearts? The answer is simple. We must fill our minds and souls with good, positive, righteous things. Attending the chapel hour is one way to guard your heart since it gives you the opportunity to have some quiet time, get away from the busyness of life and allows you to hear uplifting talks or watch inspira-

tional performances. Other ways to guard your heart could be listening to some uplifting music or encouraging talks through podcasts, online speeches, etc. The point is that if we focus on what is good, we are naturally inspired to be good. But if we focus on what is bad, we are naturally influenced by negativity.

Only by getting to know God and His abundant love for us, and only by allowing His teachings to change us from the inside can ever help us to become better people, centered on what is right. Consequently, this would lead to our mouths producing words that are good and edifying to others.

My motto is to live a life that is a blessing to others, to bring joy with my smile, and to brighten people's life with my optimism and positive energy.

I encourage you to become influential beings, to transform the lives of those who have the privilege of knowing you. We all have our circle of influence! Let us make a difference wherever God has placed us.

God has created you with a specific and personal purpose. There are many people out there who need your love, your encouragement, your gratitude, your praise, your compliment . . . The people you know, I may never get to know. Cherish your circle of influence. Understand that you might be the only person God sends to encourage someone. Think about the power your words can have on someone's life. Use your mouth to share and spread love! God bless you!

(社会学部准教授)