

AN ENCOURAGING WORD, written for publication in the Monroe Journal, October 18, 2012, by Dr. Thomas Lane Butts, Pastor Emeritus, First United Methodist Church, Monroeville, Alabama

WATCH YOUR WORDS

For many years the Reader's Digest has featured a section designed to test and improve your vocabulary. The name of that popular article has changed from "It Pays to Enrich Your Word Power" to "Word Power" but the feature section has persisted through the years because people instinctively recognize that there is power in words.

When what we do and how we look and how we spend our time and money is consistent with our words, then our words are authoritative, persuasive and powerful.

The power to use words with pen or tongue has great potential for good or evil. Some words are like a dagger that stabs and wounds; and some words soothe and heal like the Balm of Gilead. You do not have to listen to a person, or read their works, for very long before you sense the flavor of their words and their worlds.

How many times have you started the day muttering words such as: "This is going to be one of those days. I will probably have a flat tire on the way to work. Nobody is going to buy what I am selling. It is just my luck!" By the time you meet the first person after you leave home, you have so conditioned yourself to fail that you would reject success if it looked you in the face. Can you hear the damage your words are doing to you? Would you accept these words, aimed at you, by someone else? I am appalled at what damage I see people do to themselves with their words.

In addition to the damage we may do to ourselves with words, we are constantly exposed to negative people who either thoughtlessly or intentionally lay some negative word on us. We need to remember that we do not have to accept their negative world as our own. There is no reason why we should allow our day or our lives to be defined by words that have been bred dry of faith and hope, or words that have had all the love wrung out of them.

General Robert E. Lee had a general who never ceased to criticizing and speaking ill of him. One day at a high level staff meeting General Lee was asked to give an evaluation of that general to President Jefferson Davis. Lee praised the general as one of the most capable men in the Confederate Army. After the meeting one of Lee's aids pulled him aside and said: "General Lee, how could you give such a commendation of that man? Surely you must know how often and unfairly he has spoken ill of you!" "Yes" said General Lee, "I know what he has said of me, but the President asked for my opinion of him, not his opinion of me".

Watch your words! Words are powerful, and often say more about the speaker than the situations or persons they describe.

(If you wish to comment on this column, Dr. Butts' email address is tolabu2@frontiernet.net)