



## more to do

- Read the list of the Fruits of the Spirit in **Galatians 5:22–23**. Talk about how you can reflect each of these gifts in what you say and do.
- Talk about a time when you, as a Christian, needed to use “right words” to defend someone being wounded verbally by someone else.
- Take time in your LWML circle to give words of encouragement to each other.
- Think about ways in which your group can provide positive encouragement to your congregation, family, and others in your circle of friends and neighbors.
- Sing “Comfort, Comfort Ye My People” (LSB #347; LW #28; TLH #61)

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# Words Fitly Spoken

by Anita Reith Stohs

A former coworker had come back for an office party honoring an old friend. She did not look happy. When I came up to her, she told me why. Despite the passing of a year, she could not forget comments made to her by someone else attending the gathering. The sleepless nights, the tears she had cried, all came back to her as she entered the room where her old antagonist stood. As this former coworker spoke to me, I was at a loss for words to say to her. And perhaps, in this case, no words were the best response. What she needed was a chance to tell how the words of her former coworker had wounded her.

*A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver (Proverbs 25:11 ESV) were words found on a plaque found in my parents' home when I grew up. I was reminded of those words when my coworker shared her anguish with me.*

Words not fitly spoken are like arrows of hate that can fester for years.

The woman who shared her heartache with me had been the kind of person to whom others could turn to when they were hurt. The person whose words had so hurt this woman was someone who used words spoken without thinking, without compassion, in a negative way.

Ironically, both women were church-going Christians. The woman who had hurt her coworker's feelings often talked about her many church activities. Her words, however, often were hurtful instead of helpful, resulting in an unintended negative witness to the faith she professed.

It is not by chance that the Bible often warns of the danger of words not fitly spoken. The story of Joseph and his brothers provides ample examples of unfit words within and without a family setting. Joseph's admonition to his brothers to keep from quarreling during the trip back to get their father was not without foundation (Genesis 45:24).

The third chapter of James goes into detail about the dangers of an untamed tongue. Although saying the right words was a problem for the woman to whom I referred at the beginning of this devotion, when I look at my own choice of words during any given day, I have to admit I also fail to use the right words God would have preferred. Because of our sinful nature, all of us have a problem with an untamed tongue.

Bible passages that exhort us to encourage or build up each other in the faith are also reminders of the good words God wants His children to say to one another. James follows his discussion on the dangers of the tongue with encouragement for the Christian to show conduct reflecting the wisdom that comes from heaven — peace-loving, considerate, submissive, peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy, and good fruits.

But try as much as we might, we can't get it right. Like St. Paul, we have the desire to do and say what is good but can't carry it out. (Romans 7) Like Paul, the Holy Spirit turns us to Jesus for rescue — He, who had words of derision thrown at Him from the crowd standing below the cross, did not revile in return. He died on the cross to forgive our sins, including those of verbal commission (saying the wrong words) and verbal omission (choosing to keep silent when we should speak up in defense of someone being verbally attacked).

The Advent hymn, “Comfort, Comfort, Ye My People,” based upon Isaiah 40, tells of the coming of the Promised One — Jesus Christ, The Messiah. Jesus comes to us today in Word and Sacrament, with words of forgiveness, comfort, and peace. Words of His forgiveness, comfort, and peace are the right words for us to pass on to others.

*Prayer: Lord, forgive us for words that tear down rather than build up. Build up our faith through the power of the Holy Spirit so that what we say and do reflects Your saving love for us. Amen.*