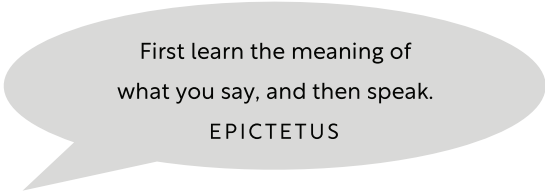


# 1

## WHAT MAKES US SAY WHAT WE SAY?



First learn the meaning of  
what you say, and then speak.

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According to [wordraiders.com](https://wordraiders.com), each of us has an estimated vocabulary of about thirty thousand words, and we use an average of sixteen thousand words every day. That doesn't include the words that flow from our minds to our fingertips when we are typing an email or a text. A lot of words come from our heads, perhaps more than we perceive.

Words mean something. They express what is on our minds and hearts. We express ideas or emotions, validation or disapproval, kindness or harshness, anger or praise, and much more. Whatever our hearts feel or our minds think becomes a word connection, whether audibly or not. What drives us to express these things?

In a post for Forbes, Dr. Leon E. Moores says, "Human beings have a powerful need to be heard. We all want to feel valued and recognized for who we are. And when another human being takes the time to listen to us, we give that person our trust, our loyalty, and even our affection."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Leon E. Moores, "Want to Be Heard? You Must Learn to Listen," Forbes, April 22, 2024, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesbooksauthors/2024/04/22/want-to-be-heard-you-must-learn-to-listen/>.

## WHAT MAKES YOU SAY THAT?

We have a need to be heard. Whether it's to teach something, express an opinion, help someone, or generally communicate, we all need to speak out and have our say. Verbal communication is part of being human.

But where do we get the emotions and ideas we feel we need to express? Life circumstances shape us, of course. Tragic events often have a lasting impact on the way we think and act. Other factors also play a part. Friendships, familial relationships, work and colleagues, our church family, and many more. These all contribute and become part of the story of our life—good or bad.

Sources outside the home and workplace also influence us. The internet is an incredible invention, yet its complexities seep into our lives, often without our noticing. We can watch a YouTube video to fix the refrigerator, browse the TikTok store for the latest gadget, check Instagram for gardening tips, scroll through Facebook to see what a high school friend has been up to lately, and find out the latest news from different sources—all while being tracked by algorithms! And all of this can happen within seconds.

We can comment on every one of these platforms without being face-to-face. We can search to our hearts' content and share our thoughts with anyone about anything. We can use our words to affirm or condemn, to lift up or tear down, to love or hate.

To understand our words, whether in speech or writing, we must ask a simple question: *What makes me say that?*

Nowhere is this more important than in the words we speak about our faith.

The foundation of my faith was not something I often thought about as an adult. As a regular churchgoing Christian throughout my life, I knew God existed and Jesus died

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for my sins, but *why* I believed in the truth of Christianity wasn't something I questioned. All my close friends were other Christians. What reason did I have to explain what I believed or why?

That is, until October 25, 2010.

My oldest daughter, Jen, left the house that foggy day at 6:45 a.m. to go to school. About a mile from our home, her car collided with a pickup truck on a gravel road. She sustained a traumatic brain injury and was airlifted to a level-1 trauma hospital about twenty-five miles away. The force of the accident caused nerve connections in her brain to stretch and tear, leaving her unable to walk or think clearly for herself. After three days in a coma and seven more in the hospital, she was discharged to a rehabilitation facility where she learned to navigate the physical and cognitive challenges she faced.

Jen defied the odds and soon became a walking miracle. Within a few weeks, she was back on her feet, battling the physical limitations imposed by the accident as her brain rapidly formed new neural connections. Once Jen returned home, she continued with outpatient therapies, and we watched her steadily transform into a new version of her old self. There were differences, some of which are still evident today, but she quickly regained much of what she had lost. Our family, church community, and many people around the world prayed fervently for Jen and for us, and she made remarkable progress. There was no doubt that God had healed her and restored her to our family.

During that time, a friend of ours worked for a local doctor who heard about our story. Somehow, we got in touch, and he tried to encourage me by saying, "Sheila, I know why your daughter is healing so quickly."

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“Why is that?” I asked.

“You and your husband, Tim, are amazing people. You consistently give back to the world, showing compassion and helping others every day. Karma—that’s why your daughter is healing. You’re reaping what you’ve sown. It’s like ‘what goes around comes around,’ and the goodness you’ve cultivated is shining back on you.”

Astonished by his conclusion, I thanked him for his encouraging words. But how did he know what my husband and I did for others? Was he the judge of how much good was enough? How had I reached such a high level of karma? Other people had done many more good things than we had and suffered worse than we did. I wondered why I deserved such kindness from God or any other external forces.

Deep down, I wanted to tell the doctor how God had healed our daughter and how the prayers of saints showed Christian faith in action. Jen experienced the miracle of a restored life because God chose her to be healed, and prayer played a much larger role than we could ever understand. Nothing my husband or I did, or could do, contributed to her healing. It was by God’s infinite mercy that she was thriving as she was.

That brief conversation haunted me. Just planting that tiny seed of “karma” in my mind, allowing it to rattle around, caused me to ponder: *Maybe karma actually did play a role in Jen’s recovery, like a hamster on a wheel, and now she’s breaking out of the karmic cycle.*

But what exactly is karma, anyway? Can karma and Christianity coexist? Do they work hand in hand to create positive outcomes for people who are moral and kind—assuming I am moral and kind? These questions kept surfacing in my brain as Jen rapidly rebuilt hers.

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For the next seven months, God guided me on a path only he could orchestrate. I knew the Bible was true, and as a Christian, I believed every word of it. I started to ask how the Bible could impact my life so profoundly that I could have convincingly answered the physician and defended the faith I claimed to have. My inability to defend my faith made me question whether I truly believed what I said. The catchphrase “This ain’t your mama’s faith, it’s yours” compelled me to return to school to discover the truth of what I believed.

Majoring in Christian Apologetics, the study of how to defend my faith, was incredibly challenging. The term *apologetics* comes from the Greek word *apologia*, meaning “defense.” When you were young, your mom might have said, “Apologize to your brother for pushing him.” In American culture, this essentially means “say you’re sorry.” The original meaning, however, is different. At its origin, to apologize is to defend yourself, and would evoke a response like “I pushed you because the car was going to hit you!” That is a defense. (Of course, if you pushed your sibling because you were mad, by all means say, “I’m sorry!”)

Apologetics defends. Christian apologetics defends the faith we have.

Over the years, I have learned to answer tough questions such as “What is karma, and does it really exist?” To explore a topic related to my beliefs, I created a general plan and developed a method for drawing personal yet accurate conclusions. Having a form to fill out is helpful, whether we do it from top to bottom or “jump around” and complete it as the Holy Spirit guides. This method suits both the simplest minds and the most serious thinkers because the process is highly individual.

## WHAT MAKES YOU SAY THAT?

I encourage you to join me on the journey to discover what you truly believe, so you will know what you mean when you speak. In the words of the first-century philosopher Epictetus, "First learn the meaning of what you say, and then speak."