



Words That *Heal*

40 Encouraging Stories Inspired by James 3:1-12

Michael Ross & Brian Doyle

gotandem.

An Imprint of Barbour Publishing, Inc.

© 2015 by Back to the Bible

Print ISBN 978-1-63058-374-3

eBook Editions:

Adobe Digital Edition (.epub) 978-1-63409-455-9

Kindle and MobiPocket Edition (.prc) 978-1-63409-456-6

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted for commercial purposes, except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without written permission of the publisher.

Churches and other noncommercial interests may reproduce portions of this book without the express written permission of Barbour Publishing, provided that the text does not exceed 500 words or 5 percent of the entire book, whichever is less, and that the text is not material quoted from another publisher. When reproducing text from this book, include the following credit line: "From *Words That Heal*, published by Barbour Publishing, Inc. Used by permission."

All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Scripture quotations marked *esv* are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked *msg* are from *THE MESSAGE*. Copyright © by Eugene H. Peterson 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group.

Scripture quotations marked *nasb* are taken from the New American Standard Bible, © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations marked *nkjv* are taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked *nlt* are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation copyright© 1996, 2004, 2007 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

The authors are represented by and this book is published in association with the literary agency of WordServe Literary Group, Ltd., www.wordserveliterary.com.

Published by goTandem, an imprint of Barbour Publishing, Inc., P.O. Box 719, Uhrichsville, Ohio 44683, www.barbourbooks.com

Our mission is to publish and distribute inspirational products offering exceptional value and biblical encouragement to the masses.



Printed in the United States of America.

Contents

Starting Point: How to Live What James Taught	7
<i>Imagine How Powerful Our Witness Could Be If We Actually Learned to Tame Our Tongues!</i>	
Part One: Healing Words for the Church	13
1. Acting as If We've Been Baptized in Lemon Juice (and Other Ways We Repel People)	15
2. You Are the Church	20
3. Becoming a Master Builder	23
4. Hospital Mentality vs. Country Club Mentality.	27
5. Creating a Safe Harbor for Everyone	32
6. Seeing Christ in Our Words and Deeds.	37
7. Navigating the Fear Factor	41
8. Loving Words for Unlovely People.	45
9. Loving Words for Laymen and Leaders.	47
10. Ready to Rethink Church and Start Living What Christ Intended?	50
Part Two: Healing Words for the Workplace	55
11. It's Time to Be a Cubicle Missionary	57
12. Unlock a Dream	62
13. Secrets of a Ragamuffin Worker: What We Can Learn from Manning and Mullins	66
14. Holding Your Tongue and Turning Your Cheek.	71
15. "But I Feel Like a Christian Doormat" (When and How to Speak Up).	75
16. Shared Meaning: A Transformational Communication Style	79
17. Ten Basics of Workplace Evangelism	83
18. Kind Words for Mean Bosses.	88
19. Kind Words for Cantankerous Colleagues	92

20. Ready to Rethink the Workplace and Start Walking Our Witness?	96
Part Three: Healing Words for the Family	101
21. Building a Stress-Less Home	103
22. Resolving Conflict: The Ephesians 4:26 Principle	108
23. Integrity: Marks of a Thriving Family.	112
24. What to Say When Families Fracture	116
25. Father Hunger: Healing Messages Kids Need	121
26. Becoming the Proverbs 31 Mother.	126
27. Essential Words for Wives	131
28. Essential Words for Husbands	134
29. Essential Words for Children	138
30. Ready to Rethink Our Connections with Family and Start Giving More to the Ones We Love?	142
Part Four: Healing Words for the Community	147
31. Go Ahead—Take an “Eternal Risk”	149
32. Ordinary Heroes, Extraordinary Impact.	153
33. Divine Appointments	156
34. Breaking Our Christian Bubbles	159
35. Love in Action	162
36. Three Stories: A Way to Witness	165
37. Leading the Way.	170
38. Powerful Words That Open Doors	173
39. Powerful Words That Erase the Hate	178
40. Ready to Rethink Community and Start Serving Our Neighbors?	182
Notes	185

Starting Point: How to Live What James Taught

*Imagine How Powerful Our Witness Could Be
If We Actually Learned to Tame Our Tongues!*

Forty Years Ago: Another Day, Another Word Bullet

The jittery thirteen-year-old swung open the cafeteria doors, scanned the room, and then froze. A sharp, sickening pain jabbed at the pit of his stomach.

Day after day, the same thing, Keith thought. *I just can't handle this anymore.*

It wasn't the strange cafeteria smells that made him queasy. Keith knew he was about to face something far worse: the firing squad at the so-called cool kids' table.

"Oh, look who it is," blurted a sarcastic voice. "It's our best friend Keith. Come sit here, Keith—we've been waiting for you!"

The teen's heart began playing keyboards with his rib cage, and every muscle grew tense. He took a deep breath and stepped into the food line. Suddenly the same worn-out barrage of painful word bullets began to fly.

"Dork."

"Sissy."

"Wimp."

An empty milk carton smacked Keith on the side of his head, and laughter rose from the table. He squeezed his eyes shut.

Why does this stupid line have to go past these guys? Keith asked himself. *And why won't they leave me alone?*

Fast-Forward to the Present: Those Words Still Hurt

During meetings, Keith avoids eye contact with his boss. *Don't want her to call on me to answer questions,* he tells himself. *Just want to blend in and go stealth.*

Even as others at the table speak nonsense about issues within his

expertise, Keith remains quiet. *I'll correct them later in an email.*

The fifty-three-year-old executive panics when public attention is focused on him, especially in a room filled with supervisors and vice presidents. His tongue gets tied and his heart races.

But remove the spotlight, and Keith suddenly shines.

It's crazy, he tells himself. Why do I act this way? I get around crowds, especially during meetings, and I freeze up. It's as if I relive the cafeteria torture from when I was thirteen. Yet that was so long ago, and I'm not that zit-covered, scrawny kid anymore. But those words. To this day, I can still hear them—and they still hurt.



A bit in the mouth of a horse controls the whole horse. A small rudder on a huge ship in the hands of a skilled captain sets a course in the face of the strongest winds. A word out of your mouth may seem of no account, but it can accomplish nearly anything—or destroy it!

It only takes a spark, remember, to set off a forest fire. A careless or wrongly placed word out of your mouth can do that. By our speech we can ruin the world, turn harmony to chaos, throw mud on a reputation, send the whole world up in smoke and go up in smoke with it, smoke right from the pit of hell.

This is scary: You can tame a tiger, but you can't tame a tongue—it's never been done. The tongue runs wild, a wanton killer. With our tongues we bless God our Father; with the same tongues we curse the very men and women he made in his image. Curses and blessings out of the same mouth!

My friends, this can't go on. A spring doesn't gush fresh water one day and brackish the next, does it? Apple trees don't bear strawberries, do they? Raspberry bushes don't bear apples, do they? You're not going to dip into a polluted mud hole and get a cup of clear, cool water, are you?

—JAMES 3:3–12 MSG

The writer of this passage, James (a brother of Jesus), makes clear what most of us feel all too often: words can be cruel.

In fact, they can hurt—even destroy.

Unlike a gunshot or knife wound, reckless words can weaken a person's self-confidence. This includes those seemingly innocent cuts, slams, and jabs; those playful—but unkind and unflattering—labels we like to pin on others. We use them at church, in the workplace, in our families, and all throughout our communities. But the wounds caused by reckless words often don't heal for many years, if ever. They enter our ears and burrow themselves deep into our hearts. They may be stored deep in the mind, but they are never completely forgotten.¹

Keith is a prime example. He isn't just a character we dreamed up. He's a *real* person who endured *real* pain. He claims the teasing he received as a child nearly messed up his identity. Check out the rest of his story:

"It got to a point where my own friends wouldn't even sit by me during lunch. We'd get to the cafeteria, and they'd conveniently disappear.

"So why did some of the guys at school give me such a hard time? I was a sensitive kid, and the girls liked me. Also, I was a Christian and didn't cuss or get into trouble. On top of that, I was a musician—not an athlete. In fact, I hated gym. I was the teen who was always picked last.

"By the end of my junior high years, I'd begun to think I was weird because I was creative and not athletic. What saved me was the support I got from my parents, my church, and my youth group.

"When I entered high school, I mustered up the courage to start a campus Bible study. I thought, *Okay, if the guys at school have already labeled me "weird," what will I lose by going all the way with my faith?*

"An amazing thing happened. When I accepted myself and did my best to be confident in the person God made me to be, I slowly gained acceptance from others—even from some of the guys who used to tease me."

Life definitely improved for Keith, but he admits that the wounds from the constant "word bullets" haven't fully healed. Sometimes they swirl through his brain and attack his confidence—usually when he steps into a meeting at work.

"God's still working on my life," he says. "He's impressed upon me the importance of using my speech positively; using words that will help heal the wounds of others."

Ready to Grow Your Spiritual Vocabulary?

This book can help you grow your spiritual vocabulary. Inspired by James 3:1–12 and filled with forty engaging stories and dozens of relevant scriptures, you'll learn how to use your speech positively—speaking kindness, sharing words that heal, expressing love, and praising God.

Four main topics guide the discussion: healing words for the *Church*, the *workplace*, the *family*, and the *community*. Read these pages on your own for personal reflection or use this book in a small group study. Better yet, gather the entire family and study *Words That Heal* together for the next forty days.

Each entry will spark conversation and spiritual growth using these sections:

- Healing Journey—inspiring stories
- Healing Steps—practical tips and scriptures to apply
- Healing Words for Growth—plenty of room to journal and personalize the content

And each section is filled with healing words for nearly every age, stage, and circumstance, as well as *Ready to Rethink* entries: four interactive studies that will help you apply God's healing words to your church, workplace, family, and community.

Let's get started.

*Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days,
keep your tongue from evil and your lips from telling lies.*

PSALM 34:12-13

*The words of the reckless pierce like swords,
but the tongue of the wise brings healing.*

PROVERBS 12:18

“If someone has a hundred sheep and one of them wanders off, doesn't he leave the ninety-nine and go after the one? And if he finds it, doesn't he make far more over it than over the ninety-nine who stay put? Your Father in heaven feels the same way. He doesn't want to lose even one of these simple believers.”

MATTHEW 18:12-14 MSG

Part One



**HEALING WORDS
FOR THE CHURCH**

1

Acting as If We've Been Baptized in Lemon Juice (and Other Ways We Repel People)

Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

EPHESIANS 5:1-2

Maybe you can't wait for Sunday to roll around. Maybe you attend a model church—a warm, welcoming place filled with smiling faces, kind words, healing ministry.

Chances are, you don't.

At goTandem and Back to the Bible, we're studying the spiritual lives of Christians worldwide—more than 150,000 men, women, and children to date. Know what we've learned about North American believers? More than 80 percent of us spend three months out of the year (a whole season) feeling burned out, beat up, and spiritually stuck.¹ And countless Christ-followers are just plain frustrated with church.

Unbelievable!

So if we asked you to list some of the things that bug you about your place of worship, what would you write? Here's what we've heard:

Top-Ten Reasons People Dread Sunday Mornings

10. Fake faith
9. Bad theology
8. Rejection
7. Hypocrisy
6. Worldliness

5. Cliques
4. Legalistic leaders
3. Uncaring pastors
2. Unkind Christians
1. Completely void of anything that remotely resembles Christ's love

In fact, some people are convinced that if Christ showed up at church in the flesh, He'd be ushered right out the front door. Do we care more about slick performances and marketing strategies than reaching the souls of the lost? Have our places of worship become cliquish, impersonal, depthless, mean-spirited, and lacking in genuine heart?

→ **Take a moment to evaluate your church. What are its strengths and its weaknesses? What can you do to help make life better within your church family?**

Healing Journey

Michael's Thoughts: "Christ + His People + Love = Church"

This simple formula accurately describes a church in Southern California that's near and dear to my heart. Step through the doors and its congregants greet you with smiles and hugs. And as you look around, you're instantly struck by the diversity of people: young and old, families and singles, rich and poor, professionals and blue-collar folks, extroverts and introverts, black, white, Asian, Latino, Native American.

It's like a little taste of heaven, I tell myself whenever I visit.

The worship is just as diverse and is always raw and real. No perfect voices or polished performances—just authentic praise to Jesus Christ. The preaching is alive and comes straight from the Word of God: "Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ" (Romans 10:17).

There's no ushering Jesus out the doors of this place. His Spirit is there

every Sunday—in the worship, in the preaching, in the people!

“Christ’s love changes everything,” explains the pastor. “As people get their eyes off themselves and commit their lives to Jesus—especially to being imitators of Him—God’s love begins to move through the entire sanctuary. There’s no mistaking it!”

And that’s exactly what the Lord wants: “Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God” (1 John 4:7).

Brian’s Thoughts: “Give Me Sweet, Not Sour!”

Sometimes after a big Sunday lunch, I like to splurge and order dessert: a giant frosted sugar cookie, a slice of coconut cake, a scoop of French vanilla ice cream with chocolate sauce drizzled on top. Okay, I admit I have a sweet tooth—which means I have to exercise plenty of self-control throughout the week.

In addition to dessert, I enjoy a hot cup of coffee or a cold glass of tea, but I prefer to sweeten both. Recently I was in a coffee shop where a young woman ahead of me ordered her drink, “Extra light and extra sweet!” I was not acquainted with those terms, which seemed familiar to the person fixing the coffee, so I shifted slightly in order to see the ingredients. This large concoction received six generous doses of both cream and sugar. *Wow!* That’s what I call a sweet drink!

So what do dessert and coffee have to do with that all-important activity that comes before Sunday lunch—church? I, like Michael, am convinced that the key trait of a healthy church is love. And I—just like most people—find myself repelled by Christians who act as if they’ve been baptized in lemon juice. Unfortunately, I’ve met plenty of them.

Who can forget the face of someone who just bit into lemon? The grimacing, the puckering, the sour expression. Now compare that to someone who just tasted the sweetest, smoothest slice of chocolate mousse cake!

Scripture tells us in Proverbs 16:24, “Gracious words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.” How do sweet words sound?

How do they bring sweetness to our soul?

We all know someone who always seems to have a pleasant word to share. This may be a family member or a close friend. You enjoy their presence and look forward to being around them. The words they speak may not be classified as “sweet,” but the conversations with them always seem to bring a sweetness to your soul.

Although it is true that we may not need that cookie or ice cream after dinner or that honey in our tea, we need to hear pleasant words on a regular basis for the health and healing of our soul.

Healing Steps

Define how your church should look. For some clues, read Acts 6:1–8. Based on this passage, your church leaders—not to mention *everyone* in your congregation—should be filled with. . .

- God’s Spirit
- God’s wisdom
- God’s faith
- God’s grace
- God’s power

Find ways to love people you may not like. First John 4:19–21 says, “We love because he first loved us. Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or a sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.”

Healing Words for Growth

Healing Words for My Family (and How I Plan to Use Them):

Healing Words for Growth:

Healing Words to Pray:

2

You Are the Church

You are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

EPHESIANS 2:19–22

When you think of the word *church*, what images come to mind? Steeples, crosses, altars? Consider this: a church is not just a building. And what takes place inside is much more than a “well-timed Sunday service” or a “busy schedule of classes and socials.”

As the apostle Paul explains in today's scripture passage, *you are the Church*, “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.” And as a Christian, *you* are a holy temple—a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit.

So, by itself, a church facility is just a bunch of bricks and windows and doors. But add to it the *real* holy temple—*you*—and the building becomes a *church*, a sanctuary inhabited by God Himself; a sacred house of worship where the Creator and the created commune.

→ Describe the most meaningful church service you've ever experienced. What made it so memorable?

Healing Journey

I (Michael) never quite grasped the truth that the Church is the people until I worshipped with some amazing Christians in Thailand. Believers in the hillside village of Musakee meet each week in a rustic open-air structure. Actually, their church building is nothing more than a thatched roof held up

by several wooden poles. Beneath the lean-to are rows of makeshift pews, an altar, and a cross—no plush wall-to-wall carpet or air-conditioners or stained-glass windows.

Yet when Christians gather here to worship, God inhabits this place. Praises are sung, hands are lifted, scripture is read, prayers are spoken—and this simple shelter is transformed into one of the most beautiful sanctuaries I’ve ever seen.

→ **How would you describe your church—a crowded building or a holy family of believers? Is “the worship hour” for you more of a programmed experience each week—or is it a passion? And since you are the Church, why bother setting foot in a church building? After all, can’t we worship God just as effectively on our own?**

Here’s why fellowship with a body of believers is essential:

1. Attending church gives you a chance to worship with all kinds of people: young and old, rich and poor.

2. Church enables you to be fed from God’s Word. Now you might say, “I get fed from the Bible all week; can’t I have a day off?” And I would ask, what if your spouse (or parents) used that approach in cooking meals? “We feed you six days every week. Why don’t you take a day off from eating? We don’t want you to feel as if you’re always in a kitchen environment.” I don’t think you’d be amused.

3. Going to church allows you to serve others. We should enjoy worship and study the Word (see Hebrews 10:24–25).

The choice is yours: keep Christianity as nothing more than a religion—keep it boring and dull by playing it safe, by going through the ceremonial motions and traditions of “churchianity”—or begin pursuing Jesus and His transforming *power*.

I don’t know about you, but I want to take Jesus up on His promises. I want to step out and put His Word to the test in *all* areas of my life. So, for me, church is my training ground. I walk through the doors expecting to learn something new, to encourage others and to be encouraged. Most of all, I gather with other “holy temples,” expecting to commune with my Creator.

Healing Steps

Don't settle for "churchianity." If you let Him, Jesus will take a dead, boring religion and transform it into something that is fresh and new, something that is exciting and full of life! That's what Christ came to do! He came to end "religion." That's right. He came to destroy meaningless ritual and replace it with a dynamic, on-fire *relationship*—a relationship with God Himself.

Don't allow church attendance to be a cure for insomnia. Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10). He did not say, "I've come to bore you out of your skull."

Do some soul searching today. Ask yourself a few questions: Is God the most important person in my life, or am I allowing other pursuits to push Him out of my life? Is church really boring, or am I just too tired to participate? Do I truly expect God to speak to me during a worship service, or am I just going through the motions?

Healing Words for Growth

Healing Words for My Family (and How I Plan to Use Them):

Healing Words for Growth:

Healing Words to Pray:
