

Sources of Wisdom2 Be Impeccable With Your Word Philip Gulley

Read Matthew 5:33-37 from Eugene Peterson's *The Message*

I was in North Carolina last weekend, speaking at several Quaker meetings. I had hoped it would be warm there, but when I landed in Greensboro it was snowing, and it was dark, because my plane had been delayed for several hours up in Detroit. I arrived at the airport with only 40 minutes to get my rental car and find the Jamestown meetinghouse. Since I had last been there, Federal Express had established a presence at the airport and the roads leading to and away from the airport had been changed. I got turned around and headed the wrong way, but when I tried to correct my mistake I became more confused.

I had maps, but couldn't read them, because I'd put my reading glasses in my suitcase, which I'd stored in the trunk of the car, and I was on an interstate and couldn't pull over to retrieve them. But I had a GPS unit with me. Stacey had loaned me her GPS unit, and had even kindly programmed in the addresses I would be visiting. When she had told me how to use it, I wasn't paying attention, because I'd been to Greensboro a dozen times and didn't think I'd need it. But there I was, driving around North Carolina like Mr. Magoo, leaving a trail of destruction in my wake, the bodies piling up behind me.

I turned on the GPS and a very proper British voice filled the car. “Please take the next exit,” she said. “Then turn left.” So I took the exit, but turned right, believing the British lady was mistaken. After a block or so, she came back on, called me a moron, then told me to turn around as soon as I safely could, so I did. In fact, I took every turn she suggested just to teach her a lesson and show her how wrong she was. But after about 15 minutes, she said, in that uppity, condescending way some British people have, “You have arrived at your destination. Please turn right.” So I did, right into the parking lot of the Jamestown Friends Meeting, with four minutes to spare.

I walked in the meetinghouse, people said, “You’re here! You made it! You found us!”

I said, “Naturally.”

By the end of the weekend, I had fallen in love with that British woman. I didn’t know her name. I didn’t know anything about her. I hadn’t the faintest idea what she looked like. I knew only one thing about her—that she could be absolutely depended upon to tell me the truth, and I was in love. When I had to give her back to Stacey, I was in tears. I’m thinking of going to the store this week and getting me my own British woman.

The last time we were together I mentioned the book, *The Four Agreements*, written by a man named Don Miguel Ruiz. The first agreement is “Be impeccable with your word.” I’d like to speak about that this morning, and begin by pointing out how similar that counsel is to Jesus’s words to let our *Yes!* mean *yes* and our *No!* mean *no*.

Be impeccable with your word. What keeps us from honesty? I was talking with a man last week whose spouse is in a crisis. She has, at mid-life, realized she’s developed a habit of lying, to the detriment of several close relationships. She’s always valued integrity, but has recently caught herself lying to the people closest to her. She realized she lied whenever she was afraid someone might not like her if they knew the truth about her. So she’d been lying so others would think well of her. Now that she’s aware of this tendency, she has resolved that whenever she’s starting to feel insecure, she will be impeccable with her words until honesty is again a habit for her.

The problem with lying to get people to like us, whether we are exaggerating our achievements to impress people or hiding our failures to protect our reputation, is that the person others grow to like doesn’t actually exist. He or she is a fabrication, a façade, a false front, a product of our dishonesty and not our real self.

So Jesus, and Don Miguel Ruiz, and many, many bright, wise teachers, urge us to speak clearly, with integrity, letting our *Yes!* mean *yes*, our *No!* mean *no*, making sure our words are impeccable.

Making sure our words are impeccable isn't just about what we say. That's a big part of it, but it's not all of it. Being impeccable with our words is also about the seamless integration of our lives and our values. Do we live in a manner consistent with our highest principles?

Of course, none of us are perfect, and we will sometimes fall short. But ideally our actions should be more and more in harmony with our moral values. The two ought always be moving closer. Sometimes there's disharmony between the two and we only become aware of the inconsistency over time, but the goal of our spiritual lives should be the integration of our words and our deeds, for the more integrated the two become, the more complete and peaceful and even joyful we will be.

But remember that this integration is a matter of degree and we will often have setbacks, we will have moments of dis-integration, when there is a distance between our words and lives, and the solution is to be aware of those moments when our words aren't impeccable, when our words and lives don't meet up, and to bring them together again, even when it is difficult. Indeed, especially when it is difficult.

While I was in North Carolina, I shared a meal with Jack and Janet Kirk. Jack, some of you may remember, served as our pastor here several decades ago. Great guy. In fact, everyone I've spoken with who knows Jack Kirk, loves him. They don't just like him, they love him. They're nuts about him. When I first saw that bumper sticker that read, *WWJD*, I thought it meant "What Would Jack Do?." That's how highly regarded he is. So after our lunch together, I was driving back to the home where I was staying and wondering to myself, "What is it about Jack Kirk that makes him so admirable?"

I know why I admire him. Because his words are impeccable. Because there's no disconnect between his words and his life. He speaks truthfully, he lives truthfully, and consequently he has this deep reservoir of integrity and this buoyancy of simple grace so that whenever you're around him, you feel good about humanity and optimistic about a world that could produce someone as good as Jack Kirk.

Don Miguel Ruiz asks, "Do you want to have a full and happy life?"
Be impeccable with your words.

Jesus asks, "Do you want to experience the joy of God's Kingdom?"
Start with you words, let your *Yes!* Mean *yes* and your *No!* mean *no*.

On this all the great religions and wise teachers agree—be honest with our words, and be honest with our lives.