

SHUT OFF VALVE

We got a new gas stove recently. We had used an electric stove for years, so we were not prepared for what needed to be done to install the gas stove. We found out that, before the stove could be hooked up, we had to have a shut-off valve installed at the point where the gas line connects to the stove. Current city code requires this as a safety precaution in case the gas needs to be shut off quickly. If, for whatever reason, gas should spew from the line, even a small spark could cause an explosion. This small shut-off valve can be a lifesaver.

Humans have a shut-off valve, too—on our mouth. When we open it, the valve is on; when we shut it, the valve is off. Unfortunately, this valve can also spew out poisonous materials unless we use wisdom and put our thinking mechanism (called our brain) into gear before we begin to speak. Sometimes the sound of our own voice lulls us into complacency, and we don't realize that we are emitting noxious and/or toxic vapors.

Speech is a gift from God.

Exodus 4:11: “Then the LORD asked Moses, “Who makes a person's mouth? Who decides whether people speak or do not speak, hear or do not hear, see or do not see? Is it not I, the LORD?”

We can use words to accuse a person or encourage a person. We can use words to make people laugh or make people cry. We can use words to bring healing or hurt. We can use words to teach truth or tell lies. We can use words to bless or curse. We can use words to create gossip or to stop gossip. Your words can bring you victory in life or your words can bring you defeat.

Eph 4:29 (The Message): “Watch the way you talk. Let nothing foul or dirty come out of your mouth. Say only what helps, each word

a gift.” We are in the portion of services each week dedicated to Gifts. Whether these gifts are scripture readings, a poem or a personal witness, they all share something in common: they are edifying, they are uplifting and they are instructive.

When we are tempted to use words to bring someone down, let’s see if we meet the requirement Jesus very clearly gave us that would make it acceptable for us to have a critical and judgmental spirit. This requirement is repeated several times in the Scriptures. While different words may be used, it all boils down to this: It’s fine to condemn people as long as you have never once sinned. I don’t know about you, but that effectively takes me out of the stone throwing business.

We don’t know what people have gone through in life or the pains and hurts they have suffered. We don’t know what may have happened to them to cause them to act the way they do—sometimes they don’t even know. We only see actions—we do not see the heart. The last thing these people need is for someone to throw rocks at them and tell them what a lousy person they are.

Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount that anyone can criticize...anyone can condemn...anyone can judge. But where is the love that can reach out to a person even when they have made a huge mistake? Where is the love that will stick with a person when they are at their lowest point? The Bible says that love overlooks a person’s faults. Love believes the best in people.

How can we show this love to hurting people?

We can begin by praying for them. If we can’t seem to find the right words, let’s let Jesus be our example.

Luke 23:34: Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.”

Then, to insure we have the right words to say to them, we can pray for ourselves as David did in

Psalm 141:3: “Set a guard over my mouth, LORD; keep close watch over the door that is my lips.” We could actually use a more contemporary version of that prayer: “Help me to wisely use this shut-off valve You have placed over my mouth, LORD; keep close watch over the door that is my lips.”