



THE REVOLUTIONARY DISCIPLE

The Power of the Spoken Word

A Study to Help You Fight for the Body of Christ



THE POWER OF THE SPOKEN WORD

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Complete this study with a group, one-on-one, or on your own.

How do we fight spiritual battles? I'm convinced from Scripture and personal experience that our primary weapon in the spiritual realm is *our tongue*. Jesus used the power of the spoken word when he fought the devil in the Judean desert during his trial; the apostles used their words powerfully to convert people to Christ and to take ground for God; and Paul tells us, "Take [up] . . . the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

We fight for the kingdom with our words.

As we mentioned in Chapter 21 of *The Revolutionary Disciple*, "Live Together, Die Alone," the sword of the Spirit is the *spoken word* of God. That is, Paul calls us to "take up our arms" by fighting with our words in the spiritual realm. What does this mean exactly? And what significance does this hold in our lives today? This study helps you find answers to those questions.

First, we'll study the power of the spoken word in the life of Christ in Matthew 4–9. Then, we will look at Paul's letter to the Ephesians for key passages about the importance of our words. Finally, you'll have the opportunity to answer questions that will help you apply your studies in action. Speaking the word of God isn't supposed to be an optional "add-on" to our faith; it's intended to be our go-to weapon. It was for Jesus.

JESUS AND THE SPOKEN WORD

When Jesus fought the devil in the desert in Matthew 4, he showed us how to win spiritual battles. But prior to that scene, the voice of the Father spoke over Jesus, empowering him. He issued *a spoken word* from heaven, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17). This powerful statement from the Father launches us into a six-chapter stretch with the power of the spoken word of God threaded throughout it.

Optional: If time allows, read Matthew 4–9 and ask a simple question to yourself as you read: *What is God saying about the power of words?* On a separate sheet of paper, jot down verse references that stand out and add some notes about what you observe as you go. At the end of your reading and notes, write out some conclusions that pull together what you learned. Then, continue with this study.

Read the following passages aloud, whether on your own or in a group, and then answer the questions below.

- Matthew 4:4: Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”
- 7:24: Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.
- 8:8: The centurion replied, “Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed.”
- 8:13: Then Jesus said to the centurion, “Go! It will be done just as you believed it would.” And his servant was healed at that very hour.
- 8:16: When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick.
- 8:26: He replied, “You of little faith, why are you so afraid?” Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm.
- 8:32: He said to them, “Go!” So they came out and went into the pigs, and the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and died in the water.
- 9:6: But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. . . .” Then he said to the paralytic, “Get up, take your mat and go home.”

QUESTIONS ABOUT MATTHEW 4–9

1. How did Jesus use the spoken word of God to fight the devil in the desert (Matt. 4)?
2. How does Matthew 7:24 serve as a capstone statement for the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7)?
3. Consider the span of the power of Jesus’ spoken word in Matthew 8–9. What are all the areas of creation over which Jesus’ word holds authority? (Hint: Think physical and non-physical.)

After Jesus healed the paralytic man in Matthew 9:6, the people “praised God, *who had given such authority to men*” (Matt. 9:8). This is a profound statement about Jesus’ power, and it hints to how God’s power is now being made known on earth through the spoken word. As the New Testament develops, we learn that indeed Christ has delegated his authority to us—and this applies to the power of the spoken word, as we describe in *The Revolutionary Disciple*.

Now, let’s unpack on a deeper level the power of the spoken word today in our lives as disciples of Jesus, starting with Ephesians.

PAUL AND THE SPOKEN WORD

Sometimes called “the power book” of the New Testament, Ephesians provides a subtle yet robust theology of the spoken word of God.

Optional: As with Matthew 4–9, you might read Ephesians 1–6 on your own before continuing the rest of this study to look for this theme in Paul’s letter on your own. If time does not allow, however, you can read the key verses from Ephesians below to get the idea.

Read through these verses, and then answer the questions below.

- Ephesians 1:13: And you also were included in Christ when you *heard the word of truth*, the gospel of your salvation.
- 3:7–8: I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God’s grace given me through the working of his power. Although I am less than the least of all God’s people, this grace was given me: *to preach to the Gentiles* the unsearchable riches of Christ.
- 4:21: Surely *you heard of him and were taught in him* in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.
- 4:25: Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and *speak truthfully to his neighbor*, for we are all members of one body.
- 4:29: Do not let *any unwholesome talk* come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.
- 5:4: Nor should there *be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking*, which are out of place, but rather *thanksgiving*.
- 5:18–20: Be filled with the Spirit. *Speak* to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. *Sing* and make music in your heart to the Lord, *always giving thanks* to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- 5:25–26: Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water *through the word*.
- 6:17–20: Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is *the word of God*. And *pray in the Spirit* on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always *keep on praying* for all the saints. *Pray also for me*, that whenever *I open my mouth*, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly *make known* the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. *Pray that I may declare it fearlessly*, as I should.

By reading these verses one after another, we can see the theme of the power of the spoken word clearly: God cares about what we say. Further, Paul reveals that our words are, in fact, *very powerful* for the kingdom.

As Paul says in Ephesians 6, the word of God is our weapon in spiritual battle. He begins the warfare section at the end of his letter, “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power” (Eph. 6:10), and then describes the armor of God. The climactic piece of the armor is the spoken word of God, the “sword of the Spirit.” The primary way we gain strength and power in spiritual battle is to fight with the word of God—spoken through us by the power of the Spirit to one another. That’s incredible!

You might wonder why I’m calling it the “*spoken* word,” not just the “word of God.” While Jim and I give a fuller explanation in Chapter 22 of the book, let me summarize what we say there: Paul’s uses a specific word in Ephesians 6:17 in Greek, *rhema*. He uses this instead of *logos*. With this word choice, he emphasizes the spoken nature of the sword of the Spirit. That is, until we speak the word of God in the Spirit of God to one another, we’re not invoking the full power of the Spirit for the life of the church. Ephesians also shows us our words hold the power to tear down or build up. Disciples of Jesus must learn to wield the word of God to win in spiritual warfare.

In light of this, answer the questions below, and then move on to the final questions.

1. How is our calling to Christ anchored in the word of truth (Eph. 1:13; 4:21)?
2. How did Paul use the spoken word in his ministry (3:7–8)?
3. What power does our speech hold for the body of Christ (4:25, 29; 5:4, 18–20)?
4. What role does Christ’s word play in purifying his bride, the church (5:25–26)?
5. What is one way Paul encourages us to use our words regularly (6:17–20)?

ALL OF US TOGETHER AND THE SPOKEN WORD

Now that we’ve studied the power of the spoken word in the Gospel of Matthew and Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, let’s think about the significance of our findings for our lives today.

As we outline in the book, we don’t fight spiritual battles on our own as individuals but together with those in the church. We fight for the people of God *as the people of God*. When we reject the “me and Jesus” mentality and accept the “we and Jesus” mindset instead, we begin to think more in terms of church life, and less about our individual life only. That’s especially important as we gain strength from God by utilizing the power of the spoken word. When we think more of other Christians, we will undoubtedly use our words to speak about Christ and to build up the body of Christ. Jesus is the Word of God incarnate, and he enables us to share his truth with others, especially when we open our mouths to speak of him.

Answer these final questions on your own or with your group.

1. How have you been impacted spiritually by what someone spoke to you? Describe a specific example.
2. How can you speak the truths of Scripture to others in your local church and in your nuclear family?

3. What's one way you can hide the Word in your heart so you can more easily speak it to others in their time of need?
4. How can you make a habit of using your words to build up those in your church?
5. Do you need to repent of any "unwholesome talk" (Eph 4:29)?
6. What role does prayer play in spiritual warfare? Are you using it as you want to?
7. What's one change you think God might be calling you to as a result of this study? Are you willing to take action to seek that change? What will you do?