

# **A Simple Guide to Walking on Water: Words of Faith**

*By Bobby Schuller*

Well we're on a series on faith right now, and I'm convinced that you can't talk about faith without talking about faith words. Without talking about a faith language. Thinking about the ways in which what you say causes yourself and others to either be filled with hope and faith or to be filled with doubt and fear. You probably know more than anyone that much of the fear or faith you experience in life is very much because of the words others or yourself are saying. We tend to become like the environment and its words that we dwell in. So many of us are saturated in words! And those words have an impact on the way that we view the world, and the way that we feel and experience life.

And so today I want to encourage you if you want to change your life, change your words. You want to change your world, change your words. If you want to be a person of faith, be a person of faithful words. The purpose of our words is to build faith and to give heart, not just to others, but even to ourselves. If we become the kind of people that are always saying negative things about ourselves and others, our life is going to become in and of itself a negative experience. So much of what we say affects how we see and feel. We think it's the other way, I think

scripture teaches us that much of what we experience is the result of the things we're saying.

So I want to begin by saying this. First of all, people need your words. People need your words. The words you are saying to people, words of healing, words of hope, words of joy and especially words of faith and encouragement, people need it because there are so many other words that are coming at them, like you're not smart enough, you're not good enough, you're not young enough, you're not old enough, you're not educated enough. People need people like you to use your words of faith to change their life, change their world and change their perspective. I know there are people in this world that rely on your words of healing.

I am an encourager, naturally. I love encouraging people, but I love the word encouragement. Encouragement literally means to give heart to people. It comes from the French word "coeur" as heart. Encouraging somebody means to give them courage, to give them heart, to give them their soul back. How many of us feel as though our soul or our heart has been damaged, wounded, weakened because of a stressful week. A week in which somebody was critical to us. A week in which maybe somebody you love, they broke up with you, or maybe you're going through a trial in your family or you just lost a dear friend, or whatever.

It's so easy in life to lose heart and encouragement is the thing that gives us our heart back. And when we talk about encouragement, we're usually thinking in terms of words. Words that are said to us. Your

words are changing people's lives. So today, I want to encourage you to keep using those words to give heart to people who need it. To lift, to heal, to give wisdom, to give truth. We need powerful, life-giving, positive words in our world.

Now the bible, in particular, and Judaism especially has a deep respect, and I almost want to say fear of the power of words. There's an almost mystic view of words in our Jewish and Christian traditions. When you look through the bible, you constantly see the way in which words seem to change things. Moses isn't allowed to go into the Promised Land because God wanted him to speak to the rock instead of hitting the rock. That was supposed to be a sort of lesson that words are more powerful than hitting, than violence. It was the first way of somebody saying the pen is mightier than the sword.

You see that when the Holy Spirit lands on the church, and enters into lives of people, how does it come? In the form of fiery tongues; a new language enters into the heart and minds of believers. That's how the Holy Spirit comes upon people is in a new word, a new language. Jesus himself is referred to as the word of God. In the beginning was the word and the word was with God, the word was God, the word became flesh and dwelt among us. When Jesus heals people, he usually does it by touching and with words – be healed. Lazarus, come forward. Words have power. And we need to reclaim the creative life-giving power of our words! To not waste our words and to not use our words to hurt others,

but to use our words to build our faith and build the faith of others. To give heart back to suffering and hurting people.

You may not be healthy, you may not be strong, you may not be young, but let me tell you your words have power. And let me tell you that more than any of those things, your words can change somebody's life today. All of us, almost all of us can say something like 'I'll never forget when this person said this to me.' Words that have taken root and for some of us, destroyed and for others of us, given life. God has a word for you today. And God has a word for others through you. Let him work through you. Let him speak through you, and he is. You are speaking good words, you're encouraging people, you're lifting people up, you're telling the truth in love, you're sharing wisdom, you're studying God's word, and God is proud of you.

Do you even think that the universe was created with words? In our tradition, we believe that the universe exists because God told it to. He said 'let there be light' and there was light. 'Let there be land' and there was land. 'Let there be animals' and there was animals. And he said 'let there be you,' and there was you. He spoke you into existence. And the same way that God created the universe with words, the enemy, the devil destroyed the universe with words. 'Did God really say if you eat from that tree that you would die? He's saying that because he knows you'll become like him.' Words give life. Words destroy. Words build up, words tear down. A life-giving, body of Christ should speak only words

that give life, that encourage, that exhort, that correct, that repair, that lift, and that's what we're doing. That's what we're doing. Your words build and your words are giving life to people.

So, maybe you say today, Bobby, I need a big change in my life. You want to change your life? Change your words. You want to succeed in life? Succeed at becoming a better communicator. That is exactly right. If you want to succeed at anything, improve in your communication. Let me tell you something: communicating is not a God given gift. Communicating well is something that is learned and something that you get better at over time. Many of us say, oh I learned how to speak English when I was young, or whatever language it is you're watching in today. Many of us say oh I learned to speak my mother tongue when I was young. I've learned.. let me tell you – there is so much nuance to language that you can always get better at what you say and the way you say it, and you should never, ever stop improving your discipline of how you communicate to others. If you can communicate well to others, you will be a dynamic world-changing person. That's because nothing has more power than words.

Now James is speaking to the church. A lot of people who study James believe that James was actually a sermon, not a letter. I don't know. I speculate. But in his sermon, James is talking about this very same thing, the power of the tongue. And he says, "We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able

to keep their whole body in check.” Do you like that promise? He says if anyone can control their talking or what they say that they’re going to live a perfect life. That’s a pretty profound statement. “When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we turn the whole animal. Or take ships for example. Although they are so large and are driven by such strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants it to go.” Your tongue, your words are the very thing that can turn the ship of your life around. Such a small part of your life has such a big affect on the outcome of your living. Do you believe it?

James says if you can control what you say, you’re never going to slip up. Husbands, how many of you believe this? Huh? I can’t tell you how many times I have said something to a friend, or somebody on my staff, or to Hannah, or to one of my kids, and I’m up all night going man, I messed up. He says anyone that can control what they say never slips up and is perfect. And then he later says that’s because nobody gets perfect at this. Nobody ever is a hundred percent good at what they say.

But I think what James is saying is the first thing we need to reclaim is our fear of words. Our respect, I should say, of words. That we understand the power of words and the outcome of our lives. We think that what we feel ends up being what we say, but I think the scripture is teaching us that as we adopt new words, that actually trains our heart. In other words, even if we feel one way, but speak another way, our heart

will come in line with our mouth, not the other way around. If you want to get control of your heart, control of your emotions, if you want to get control of your life, if you feel like your life is completely out of control, get control of your words first. You do that and everything, I believe, will come in line and over time with the things that you're saying. You want to train your heart, train your mind, begin by training your words.

Henri Nouwen didn't even like to pray unless he recited the Psalms a few times because he wanted to make sure his language was in line with the language of heaven. I love that. I know that many times in sports or other areas we recognize the value of words in our motivation, in our ability to take one more step, and our ability to not fall.

I was watching this video of these two African guys training. They were in the middle of some horrible impoverished place in Africa in the middle of nowhere, and these guys, they had their shirts off, there's two of them, and they're in like this just kind of rubble thing, and they're training with concrete blocks. And these were the most ripped awesome looking guys I had ever seen. And they were training, he was like doing sit ups, and he's like hitting himself with this thing, and all they're saying is no pain, no future. He's like hitting himself in the stomach. He's like no pain, no future! I'm like man that is good. That's good. That's really good. Yes, I love it.

I remember there was this.. I like to run sometimes and I never keep running. I always fall out of it. I'm in a running mood right now, as

you probably know. I've talked about it last week. And I used to live in Orange. There is this thing called Peter's Canyon, and this hill behind me is called Big Red. If you live in Santiago Hills around there, you might recognize it. This hill is about a mile in to a five mile loop. And the first time I saw this was.. a good friend of mine, Chris Jensen, who took me running who is an insane athlete.

And anyway, I have never been able.. I was never able to run up this hill. It's about probably a quarter mile and its more than 45 degrees. It's like this. And I've always wanted to be able to run up this hill. So even as I started training and every time I would get to that hill, I'd get so close, I'd get halfway, three quarters of the way up, and then I'd die and I'd just peter out and I just couldn't get up. And I was like man I want to get up this hill and for weeks and weeks I was trying it.

So one day I'm at the book store and of course I see Joel's new book "You Can, You Will," Joel Osteen, our buddy, and I saw it.. I was like that is a good line – "You Can, You Will." So it was like a couple days later I was jogging and I was already feeling tired, and I'm like I want to get up this hill. And as I start getting close to the hill, I'm almost there, I'm like you can, you will. I got closer and I'm like you can, you will. And it's like I started going.. I'm going up the hill and I'm like you can, you will! And as I started going like you can, you will! And as I wanted to give up, I'm getting farther and farther up the hill, I'm like you can, you will! You can, you will! And I got to the top of the hill and like Rocky I was

like, I did! I did it! It was so awesome. And if you know anything about running, you shouldn't talk when you're running. It actually takes more energy when you talk but let me tell you, words got me up that hill.

Saying you can, you will, my heart was on fire, my legs were burning, my head was pounding. If you've been in sports at all, sometimes the capillaries in your lungs get so.. I forget what the word is, but you start to actually taste the iron from a little bit of blood in your mouth when you really.. and I had all that going on. It was like a hundred degrees. It was brutal and I got up that hill. I said I could, and I did.

And let me just say in a series on faith, this is so important. That when we say to ourselves going up any sort of hill of life, you can, you will, you can, you will, can I tell you that makes such a big difference? Especially when others are saying you can't, you won't, and you say I can, I will, let me tell you words will get you up the hill of your life. And no word will get you up that hill better than the word of God. He is saying to us the promises of God.. look I see something in you and God sees something in you that maybe nobody else can see. And that is that you have such immense power in you, if only you believe. And the words we say to ourselves, and the words we surround ourselves in either reinforce or erode that truth. That you can get up the hill, you can overcome, you can have the victory, and all you must do is change your words. Change what you say to yourself, change what you say to others,

change what you hear, change what you read, and believe in your heart that the word of God is true that you can and you will.

Words will get you up the hill, words will change your life, control your words and you'll control your life. Have victory in your words, you'll have victory in your life. Have victory in what you say, and your life will change. Change your words, change your life. It's that simple. And you train your words with the word of God.

You are moving from words of shame to words of honor. And I'm not just talking about others, I'm talking about yourself. Stop shaming yourself and bullying yourself. God is moving you from words of shame to words of honor. Words of fear to words of faith. He's moving you from words of mocking and sarcasm, to words of healing. You don't need to put up walls anymore, you don't need to prove yourself to anybody, you don't need to be a cynic anymore. Today, God is moving you from words of hurt to words of encouragement. Today, things change in your life. You are going to move to the next level in the way that you speak to become the kind of person that builds people up, that doesn't tear them down with your words. You won't lift yourself up by tearing others down. Encourage people. Lift them up and watch as you get to be a small part of a big victory in somebody's life because you simply changed your words.

I believe words are like seeds. That when we talk, it's like we're just reaching into a bag of seeds and just casting them out all around us.

Very much like the parable I read last week, about the seed that falls on the road and some that falls on the soil; you know that's about the word of God, but I think our words are very much the same way. And sometimes we're mixing our words. We have a bag of like wheat and a bag of weeds. And we mix it all together sometimes and we're casting out.. sure we're throwing out words of faith and words of encouragement and good things, but then we're also throwing out all of this fear and anger and contempt and vitriol, and we're just mixing it all together. And can I just tell you when weeds and grain grow together, guess what wins – it's always the weeds.

We need to remember that when we speak, whether we like it or not, we're planting seeds everywhere we go. And some of those will take root, and some of those are very dark things that you didn't mean to, but you cast out a handful of seeds on your colleagues, or on your parents, and you don't understand that those things are taking root in their life. And maybe it's been years but you don't recognize that the fruit that was born and sometimes the bad fruit that was born from them, was because of something you said.

So sometimes we have to repent and apologize and even get on our knees and say Lord, I want to get control of what I say, because as I cast seeds into the world around me, I want to be planting good things. I want to look back when I get to heaven and when I'm judged I want to look back and I want to see an orchard of good things that grew from the

words I said to my children, to my friends, and even to my enemies. I want to see that the result of my words was life-giving and building and encouraging. That I gave heart to people with what I said.

James goes on to say in James chapter 9, “With the tongue, we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings who have been made in God’s likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.”

James is very bothered by the idea that you can pray and worship and thank God and then you can go and gossip about somebody, especially a friend. That you can sing hymns and ask God to help you, but then curse the people that you work with or live with. You can say really hurtful, cruel things to the people that need encouraging words from you the most. And it’s time to cut it off. Cut those dead branches off and become the kind of people that give life-giving, encouraging words. That we don’t have salt water coming from a fresh fountain.

I think that as we learn to control our words, we will become so immensely powerful in our ability even to do things like heal and make and create. When we get control of our words, we get control of not only our life, but the space around our bodies.

You are learning to control your words. You're learning every day, you're getting better, you're getting smarter, and I believe you're going to get so good at communicating with others, that you are going to be just such a bright light in whatever fifteen feet of space it is that is around you. That your family is going to see you as a light, your friends are going to see you light, your colleagues are going to see you as a light. That because of the way you speak, you're going to change everything around you.

So I spent a lot of time and I was thinking communicating and talking and speaking, not just publicly but with others, is a learned skill. It's something that you get good at, it's something that we all are bad at at some point in our lives, and something that as we think about it, study it, read about it, practice it we get better over time. And nothing is more important than this in leading, in relationships, in being married, in business, nothing is more important to succeeding in life, even in morality, and I would even say especially in morality, than being able to get control of the power of our words.

So I wrote down three things; I can make a list of like 50, and I might even do that someday. But I wrote three things that's like communicating 101. And if you listen to these three things, I think it's going to make a world of difference in your life.

And the first is so important and this leads into the other two. What you say is not what they necessarily hear. Can I get an amen? How

many times have you said something and it just came back to bite you, and you thought you said something nice. You say something like 'oh now I see why people like you.' 'Oh, you're a lot smarter than I thought.' 'Wow, you look great today, finally.' Right? I just said something nice to him! What you say is not necessarily what people hear. This is the first thing they teach us in seminary about when you preach.

I can't tell you how many times I've preached a sermon and somebody comes up to me and they're like man, your sermon on repentance was so good. I had a lady that came, she cut my hair, she came one time, and she's like; I read something from the scripture and she said 'you said love is not rude, and that changed my life.' I was like the sermon had nothing to do with that. And I think that's still a good thing, but it's so important to remember that in our marriages, that what you say is not always what they hear. Right?

So one of the most important questions you need to ask when you're communicating something important is not what am I saying as much as what are they going to hear when I say it. Okay?

Rule number 2: and this is the most important one. People not only need to be heard, they need to feel heard. Look, we think so much of the life that we're going to give is the wisdom and the truth and all this stuff. Can I just tell you the best words that are life-giving to people are listening words? Empathetic words. In fact sometimes no words at all is exactly what people need. People need to be heard. And so when you sit

with someone, you not only need to hear them, you need to ask the question either of yourself and even of them, do they feel heard? Think about all the times when you are in an argument with your spouse or somebody you love, and you think I just don't feel like they heard me. And maybe they think they heard you, maybe they did hear you but unless you feel heard, it's so hard to really, I don't know, to feel healing.

I remember when Hannah and I were, just before we got married, we went to marriage counseling, and the first thing he taught us to do was how to have an argument. And so he was like okay you're going to get in a fight and we're going to lay some ground rules for when you get into your first fight. And we're like we're not going to fight. We're in love. She's so beautiful! I'll agree with everything. And the thing he taught us to do is that when you have an argument about something, you take turns and the other person doesn't get to go until they are able to repeat back what the first person just said. 'I feel like you hurt my feelings.' Okay, it's my turn. He's like no, no, no, you have to say back to me. 'You feel like I hurt your feelings.' Yes. Only then can you move on. And it was actually such great advice because its taught us we're not perfect. We've actually learned that sitting down and like doing this kind of thing is so important. Do you feel heard. And I feel like no matter who you're talking to, and even if it's not a conflict, if it's something whose hurting, feeling heard is so important to the healing process.

I remember when I was in pastoral training with Jim Kok, Pastor Jim, I don't know where he is but, I remember sitting and there was this group of pastors who were in training on how to help people who are going through crisis. And you have to visit people, pastors are always visiting people in hospitals and talking to people on the phone about hurting things. But in this class you had to write down your conversation with the person.

So I'm reading the conversation. It said something like I visited somebody in the hospital and I said oh have they got an x-ray yet? Like no, the x-ray hasn't come yet. And I said oh, are they going to do an MRI? Like no, the MRI hasn't come. And I'm reading this conversation and Jim interrupts me and he goes, excuse me. I said yes. He goes are you a doctor? I was like well not yet. And he said are you a doctor? I said no. He goes then why are you asking about x-rays and prescriptions and surgeries? He's like she's really sick and she needs her pastor. And it was really helpful to me. I was like oh yes, I'm not a doctor. I need to just listen and comfort and hug and pray with my friend instead of trying to fix everything.

Are your words fixing words or are your words healing words? People are not machines. Machines need fixing. People need healing. A friend of mine lost a job and I was reading this conversation and Jim says to me, he's just been hit by a train and you're telling him how to fill out an application for a new job. He's like you don't need to do that yet.

He's not asking you to do that. He's asking you to be a loving friend and to comfort him in a hard time.

And I'm so convinced the reason this is so important; this church is growing and that's a good thing. But we don't have enough pastors to shepherd this church. If you've been coming here for awhile, it's time that you move from being a parishioner to a pastor. Anyone in this room can become a pastor today. And so much of it is doing this – becoming a listening, comforting, life-giving presence. A pastor is not always a teacher. A pastor is quintessentially a shepherd; someone who guards, protects, guides, and heals. You can be a pastor today if you learn to simply use your words in a way that heal rather than fix. In a way that creates rather than tears down. In a way that lifts up rather than discourages.

Finally, number three, if you have not heard, you will not be heard. So not only does a person have to be heard, they have to feel heard, and if they don't feel heard, you will not be heard. And that is where most arguments completely break down is two people talking and not hearing each other. That is where a bad pastoral time breaks down. A pastor or a chaplain tries to fix something and this hurting, suffering person is not being heard. Nobody's empathizing, nobody is feeling the pain of this person.

So if you want to be heard, first you have to know that the person you're talking feels you're.. you want a breakthrough with your kids?

Start hearing them and stop talking to them so much. Start listening and decide I am not going to give any advice or any wisdom to my kids until I know I have heard and listened to them first. Doesn't mean you have to agree with them, it doesn't mean you have to do everything they say, but it does mean they need to feel like you have heard them and that you understand where they're coming from. Until then, just forget it.

And may I add, and this is a bonus – if you are not an encouraging person, nobody is going to listen to your so-called wisdom. If you're not encouraging, if people don't feel like you're on their side, why would they want your wisdom? I don't listen to the wisdom of people who are discouraging and mean spirited. Why? Because it's hard to trust that person. It's hard not to think that maybe what they're saying is out of anger or spite or jealousy. When somebody's encouraging, when you really are convinced this person's on my side, it is so easy to receive the wisdom or the truth that they're giving you.

So you want to break through to your kids, you want to break through to the people you're leading, you need to begin first by listening and by being encouraging. And let me encourage you. You're doing better than you think. Nobody has mastered communication, nobody has mastered their words, but every day you are growing. You are committing to being a happy and whole student of Jesus, and as you follow him, as you commit to this church, and all the other disciplines that you have in your life, God is going to form in you life-giving words, words of faith,

words that sound like you can, you will, words that speak goodness and miracles into our world. As you improve in your words, you are going to become so powerful in this world and that thrills me and excites me. You're doing great! You're doing much better than you think, and keep going.

Let's pray: Father, thank you for your word to us. Thank you that you've given us the scriptures, and we pray that our whole lives will come in line with the written word of God. And we pray that our lives would come in line with Jesus, who is the living word of God. And we pray, Father that we be more like him in everything we do. Lord, we love you, it's in Jesus' name we pray, amen.