

## Loving Language

*A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver*  
Proverbs 25:11

A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold, but sometimes it's just as fit simply to withhold certain words. This became clear to me one summer evening when I watched my husband wash his car in the driveway. Since he would drive it to a business appointment the next day, the dirt had to go. But I also noticed layers of dirt caked onto my car. It seemed to me easy enough for him to wash it as well, since he had the bucket, soap and towels handy.

"Would you mind washing my car too?" I asked.

"There isn't enough light left. I'm rushing to finish this one," he replied hurriedly. Feeling snubbed, I felt the urge to snap back, which could have ignited an argument. But something inside me quenched this impulse and instead I silently retreated to the house. While I pondered the incident inside, the sound of my car's engine outside surprised me. He decided to wash it! I marveled—sometimes the right thing to say is nothing at all. This wasn't my giving him the silent treatment, but simply choosing to restrain my tongue.

Furthermore, another aspect of fitting words is how they're delivered. Wired differently than our husbands, we wives may be quick to contribute our feminine insight. After all, why not interject a wiser, more enlightened viewpoint when appropriate? But I discovered that wise words delivered harshly are like the clanging gong of 1 Corinthians 13:1. Rather, it's important not to make our husbands feel demeaned when revealing to them another perspective.

Early in our marriage, I was eager to contribute my 'wise feedback' whether or not it was requested. However, I noticed that my husband didn't seem to appreciate this because my words were delivered in a harsh and condescending manner. I'd interrupt, thinking this was revealing how well I understood his mindset. But he looked displeased and I wondered *how could he feel this way when I'm trying to help?* I didn't realize that my interruptions were disrespectful because they didn't allow him to finish his thought. It was important for me to learn to wait before chiming in, but more significantly, I needed to listen. This meant not just *saving* my words, but *savoring* them. It wasn't enough just to wait for "time out" in order to speak my mind, but instead to reveal in my responses an understanding and respect for the thought he expressed.

Not only does listening show respect, but it also pays dividends. I discovered that listening and learning go together; consequently I've gained a better understanding of both my husband and myself. Though I place value in the stock of feminine insight, I'm unquestionably richer by comprehending his masculine perspective. On many occasions, my "Solomon" has given me wise advice that helped me deftly handle delicate personal and professional situations. His honest, thoughtful (not to mention entertaining) insight is always an invaluable resource but it does on occasion include something I may not want to hear—constructive criticism. But presented with kindness and love, it compels my respect and becomes the honest answer that's like a kiss on the lips (Proverbs 24:26).

James 1:19 instructs everyone to be swift to hear and slow to speak. This is important in marriage, but also in relationships throughout every walk of life. When we prioritize listening, we tacitly communicate to others that their words are valued above our own. True to the spirit of a godly servant, esteeming others better than ourselves (Philippians 2:3) includes valuing what they have to say. Therefore this means becoming a good listener. However, this doesn't include automatic agreement or consent to what we hear; we're never allowed to sanction sin, evil, or even foolishness. But honestly like a kiss (Proverbs 24:26) is a thoughtful *answer*, and to win another's heart requires that it first be heard and understood.

Moreover, our most important listening is hearing what God says to us through His Word. He instructed His people, "Hear O Israel, and be careful to observe it, that it may be well with you...(Deut. 6:3)." Likewise, Jesus said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear (Luke 8:8)." The soul that hearkens unto God is as the tree in Psalm 1:3, the flourishing tree planted by the river of water whose leaves don't wither. This tree bears fruit in its season, fruit that includes godly words spoken at the right time. Such words are ripe with wisdom, tempered by hearing and understanding the hearts we aim to persuade. These are the apples of gold fitly spoken, and sweet to both God and man.

By Mary Nixon