



BOOK REVIEW // WHEN WORDS MATTER MOST

CHERYL MARSHALL & CAROLINE NEWHEISER // REVIEWED BY **CASSIE WATSON**

If you're like the average person, you say around 16,000 words every day. Looking back on the past few days or weeks, what portion of those words were "good for building up" (Eph. 4:29)? How many of those words do you regret speaking? I'm chastened when I ponder my own answers to these questions—which is why I'm so thankful for Cheryl Marshall and Caroline Newheiser's recent book, *When Words Matter Most: Speaking Truth with Grace to Those You Love*.

Of course, every word we speak matters—we'll give an account of them to God on judgment day (Matt. 12:36). But surely there are some words that have special importance, like those that we say to people who are struggling spiritually. Marshall and Newheiser have written *When Words Matter Most* specifically to help us in this area. In the first chapter, they describe their goal: "to encourage and equip you to speak truth with grace into the lives of those you love" (21). This book is aimed at women, but it's a valuable resource for every Christian who wants to honour God and love others with their speech.

START WITH YOUR HEART

If you know that your words aren't as grace-filled and Scripture-saturated as they should be, you might be itching to get immediately into the second half of the book. There, Marshall and Newheiser lay out biblical truths that we can speak to those who are struggling. That's certainly what I was hoping to get out of the book. But there's important ground to cover before we get there. The authors

want us to consider our own hearts and speech.

We can't come to our loved ones with guns blazing, eager to unload advice on them—even if we've got a storehouse of sound, biblical counsel to give. "Speaking truth with grace begins with receiving and knowing the grace of God in our own lives," Marshall and Newheiser write (52). We need to be gracious people before we can truly give God's grace to others.

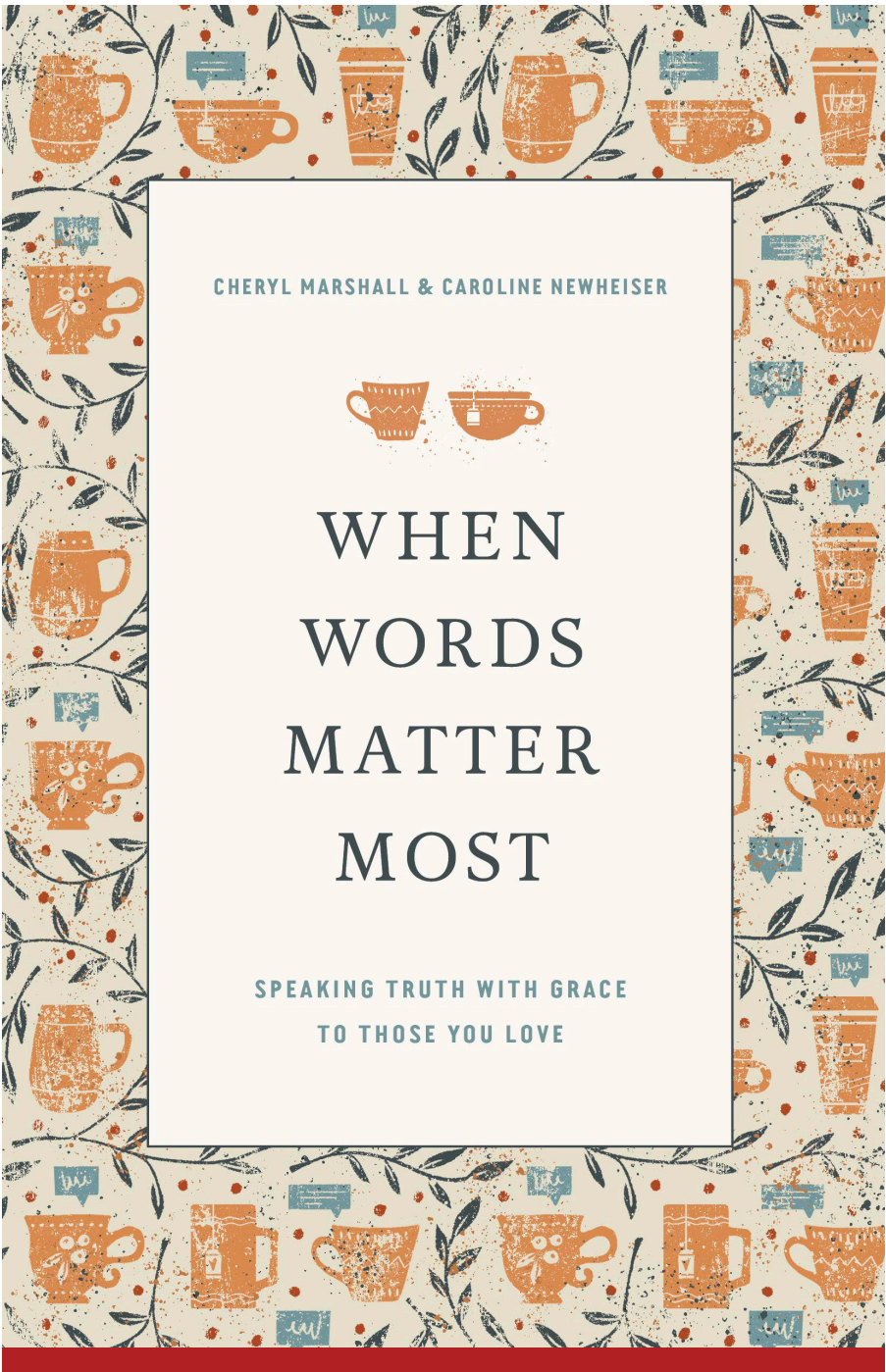
To that end, the authors spend a fair bit of time in the first half of the book helping us consider our own character. For instance, they explore what a gracious friend looks like—she is Spirit-filled, humble, and loyal. Consider the difference it makes to receive encouragement from a friend who is humble rather than proud:

To be a humble friend you must admit your own sinfulness. If you're honest with the Lord and yourself about your own struggles and shortcomings, then you won't be shocked, judgmental, or easily offended when a friend shares her sin and failures with you. (73)

When we think about confessing our sin to someone, surely this the attitude we'd want them to have toward us. Let us then seek to be humbled by God's grace so that we can embody that grace to the hurting and wayward.

SPEAKING GRACE AND TRUTH

So once we've grasped the importance of becoming



people who are eager to humbly share words of grace, what is it that we actually share? When we're standing face-to-face with a sister who's hurting or a friend who's straying, what do we say?

First and foremost, we share God's words, not our own. God transforms and comforts by his Spirit working through the Bible. So we go to Scripture.

As Marshall and Newheiser point out, this is one reason why it's so important that we spend time regularly in the Bible. Apart from what it does for our own souls, we need God's words within our hearts if they're going to overflow as a means of grace for others. I can't count the number of times I've been encouraged by a friend sharing what the Lord has been teaching her lately. It's not just the truth of Scripture that encourages me, it's how I see God using that in my friend's life to shape her to be more like Jesus.

The second half of *When Words Matter Most* digs into the specific riches that God's Word has for people in need—whether they're worried, weary, wayward, or weeping. Marshall and Newheiser

plumb the Scriptures to give you places to start as you speak truth. I was edified by just reading through these chapters, and I'm sure they'll also be a useful guide to refer back to for years to come when a friend (or my own soul) is parched for truth.

In their conclusion, Marshall and Newheiser emphasise a truth that will steady us as we speak words of grace: it's not up to us. "Jesus is the one who saves and sanctifies his people," they write, "and that was never a weight intended for you to carry" (197). We don't need to fret about outcomes or try to "fix" people. Our task is to faithfully speak truth with grace, and trust that he will use our words for his purposes.

So, what are you going to do with your 16,000 words today? The biblical wisdom from *When Words Matter Most* can guide you. Personally, I was convicted that one of my goals should be cutting this figure down—to listen more and speak less. But however many words we say, let's strive to use them to speak the truth in love.

When a friend or family member is struggling spiritually, do you ever feel uncertain about what to say? You may sense your loved ones need to hear biblical encouragement or advice but, feeling inadequate for the task, you might simply commiserate or say nothing. God calls you to something more.

In *When Words Matter Most*, Cheryl Marshall and Caroline Newheiser help you discern spiritual needs and give biblical, heartfelt guidance. Through real-life stories and carefully chosen Scripture passages, they model what to say to those who are worried, weary, wayward, or weeping. You'll learn how to speak truth to others in your sphere of influence and strengthen the body of Christ as a whole.

"This practical, powerful book challenges believers to allow Scripture's healing balm to flow naturally into our relationships and conversations."

Deborah Young
Chief Curriculum Officer,
Bible Study Fellowship

"The authors do not seek to provide a formula for success, but rather carefully suggest methods to encourage the fainthearted and do so with grace."

Mary K. Mohler
Director, Seminary Wives
Institute, The Southern
Baptist Theological Seminary

CHERYL MARSHALL (MM, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) is a wife, mom, counselor, and Bible teacher. She has over twenty-five years of experience teaching and discipling women, and she currently serves as director of women's ministries at Founders Baptist Church in Spring, Texas. You can connect with her at cherylmarshall.com.

CAROLINE NEWHEISER (MACC, Reformed Theological Seminary, Charlotte) is an ACBC-certified counselor. She has been a pastor's wife for over thirty years and is currently the assistant coordinator of women's counseling at Reformed Theological Seminary, Charlotte. Caroline's ministries include counseling, blogging, and speaking to women's groups. You can connect with her at carolinewheiser.com.

 **CROSSWAY**
crossway.org

CHRISTIAN LIVING
ISBN 978-1-4335-7124-4 5 1 6 9 9
 9 781433 571244
US \$16.99