

# The Importance of Words

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ONE OF THE most powerful forces at work in the world today is the ability to speak fluently. So important are words that many scientists believe that language ability is the missing link between man and the ape. So important are words that hundreds of people devote their lives to the study of etymology and to the compilation of more complete and correct dictionaries, and thousands more continually strive to increase and excel in word power. With words alone, one can hurt deeply or heal gently; one can exalt or degrade; one can lead or be led. Used in the right way, words can be instruments of greatness; and used in the wrong way, they can be weapons of perfidy. There is no greater indication of Abraham Lincoln's magnanimity as a man than his magnificent Gettysburg Address; and there is no better illustration of the deceit of a politician than his hypocritical campaign promises.

It should not be concluded, however, from these statements, that we are powerless in the face of a person who is a glib speaker, that we are hypnotized by words and have no control over our actions in response to them. These statements are only meant to bring out the fact that words do have some influence over our thoughts and behavior. Nothing can more easily sway a mob from one subject of allegiance to another than a few fawning phrases. Yet, an individual does not have to be controlled by others' speech. It is within everyone's power, through a comprehensive knowledge of words, to choose between right and wrong and to formulate his own opinion. The achievement of this knowledge can be accomplished by wide reading of good literature, careful and attentive listening to good speakers, and thoughtful observation of words everywhere, always with the idea of accumulating and increasing a superior vocabulary. This increased mastery will in turn give a fuller understanding of important issues. Word power makes us more discriminating in our choice of ideas and values and more eloquent in the expression and defense of these ideas and values.

Thus, all of us have the power to be leaders of men through language ability. We can all be independent in the formulation of our thoughts and in their expression. Yet, it must not be imagined that just because a person has a large vocabulary, he is omnipotent. Actions, not words, lead to the final analysis of a man's character; and it is his ability to get things done well, and not his proficiency in promising to get them done, that determines a man's degree of success in life. Lofty words and idealistic phrases will not long conceal lowly ambitions and deceitful actions. The importance of words lies in the fact that through the medium of language man is able to express his innermost thoughts to the world. Words are but indications of future action; they are pointers on the road to greatness.