



FIGHT LIKE JESUS

WINNING THE WAR OF WORDS

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Winning the War of Words

By Mark Herringshaw

- “Be quiet!”
- “Be clean!”
- “Be still!”
- “Be free!”
- “Be unafraid!”
- “Be opened!”
- “Be careful!”
- “Be yours!”
- “Be alert!”

Words of Jesus from *The Gospel of Mark*

Fight Like Jesus

Say something, for God's sake!

When Jesus shows up, things happen. When he comes, he speaks words and recreates the world. Words are his weapons of choice and tools of design. He could have hurled lightning bolts, or split mountains with his fist, or with a wave of his hand tossed armies into the sea. Instead, Jesus said things.

Words, when they are the right words, spoken by the right messenger, deliver power.

Jesus explained his mission using the same words Isaiah the Prophet borrowed from God:

*"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor"*
Luke 4:17-19.

Jesus claimed these words as his commission: He would *proclaim* things as they ought to be. Everything Jesus did in the three years of his work on earth followed what God had spoken through Isaiah seven centuries earlier.

- Jesus' words met physical needs. He turned water to wine, multiplied bread and fish – twice – and provided finances to cover a tax bill. Jesus' words supply enough and make *provision* a sign of his regime.
- Jesus' words pardoned the guilty. He declared a leper "clean" and a prostitute "forgiven." Jesus' words release grace and make *pardon* a sign of his regime.
- Jesus' words healed the broken. He declared a blind man "whole" and dead girl "alive." Jesus' words transmit power and make *healing* a sign of his regime.
- Jesus' words expelled demons. He drove out a legion of spirits and silenced a blasphemer. Jesus' words command authority and make *deliverance* a sign of his regime.
- Jesus' words revealed Father's love. He told stories of victory in this world, and hope in the next. Jesus' words create vision and make *favor* a sign of his regime.

With words God created the world. With words the Enemy tries to foil God's plans. His foul mouth steals and bends words to break things and kill people. Jesus invaded the earth to stop him. The fallout sparked the war of words.

Jesus dealt the decisive blow in this war when he hung on the cross, and said, "It is finished!" We enforce that victory, silence the devil, and repair the damage he inflicts when we borrow other words from Jesus. When all else fails – and it will – we say what Jesus said.

Our enemy attacks along nine fronts. We must meet and defeat him at each. Jesus fought these same battles. With his own words he turned back every assault. As followers of Jesus, we can do the same by borrowing and leveraging what Jesus said at the moment we face the battle.

We do not presume to be *like* Jesus. Only Jesus is Jesus. We speak Jesus' words "in Jesus' name" which means "on Jesus' behalf." That is all; that is enough. The question is not "What *would* Jesus do?" but "What *is* Jesus doing?" and "How can I join him?" Our commission is simple: Say what Jesus said. Jesus' words in our mouths are as Jesus' words in his.

We will not have the luxury of learning the theory of war. Our training will come on the front lines, where we work, live, go to school, buy our groceries. There we must execute or be executed.

Yes, we are at war. It is a war of words, where words always become flesh. It is a war that will end all wars. In the beginning was the Word; in the end will be the Word. And when all is said and done, all will be done when all is said!

Man of Action

His name means “warrior,” but early on, Mark had run scared. We don’t know details, but something happened to set him off. Fear of being mocked, or worse? Fear of losing the security he felt from familiar surroundings? Fear of not knowing how to fight to win? Whatever, Mark went AWOL.

We piece together Mark’s story from *Acts* in the New Testament, a reference in a letter from Paul, the Gospel that bears his name, and from Church tradition. By the end, Mark makes a remarkable recovery and lives and dies equal to his name, “Warrior.”

As a young man, Mark joined Paul and Barnabas when the community of Jesus-followers in Antioch commissioned them to plant churches around the Mediterranean. It proved an adventure too dangerous for Mark to endure. Shortly after the mission began, Mark turned tail and headed home. Only he could explain why.

Mark appears again some months later after Paul and Barnabas return, meet with leaders in Jerusalem, and strategize for another trip. Big-hearted Barnabas wants to give Mark another shot. Paul strongly objects. The two nearly come to blows over the matter and in the end they split up. Paul takes Silas on the planned trip. Barnabas takes Mark and heads to Cypress.

Barnabas saw Mark’s potential as he had once seen Paul’s potential when other Christians couldn’t trust him. Barnabas had a task to restore Mark; Paul had a task to accomplish. Both good causes, but rooted in different values.

Paul succeeded. So did Barnabas. Mark grew up and grew out of his fear. Tradition says that Mark became a colleague of Peter and in time the leader of the North African church of Alexandria. Mark was martyred during the persecutions of Nero. In the end he didn’t run away

Not long before his death, Mark had a novel idea—literally. Having listened carefully to Peter’s retelling of Jesus’ life and teachings, he decided to collect the stories in a narrative. The result was the *Gospel of Mark*. Taking Mark’s example, Matthew, Luke, and John followed with accounts of their own, filling in details Mark did not originally include.

The tone of Mark’s account is bold. He wrote for Romans who valued practical action. Mark’s Jesus is a man of action, at war with the demons of hell and their human allies. Yet Jesus fights, not with a sword or political maneuvers, but with a few, powerful, carefully chosen words.

Mark conquered his fear and became what his name denotes. He became a warrior who fought as Jesus fights – with a few choice words. As Mark borrowed from Jesus, so can we.

Jesus doesn't say much in Mark's Gospel. But when he speaks, things happen. Here's a suggestion. Read the book straight through in one sitting. Read it aloud. Let the lean and simple narrative do the work.

As you read, follow Jesus. Don't think your way along. Jesus' first followers didn't understand what would happen until after they began. Jesus said, "Come," then he turned and walked away, leaving them time to grab two deep breaths before deciding their destiny. Those who joined him immediately joined his work: Peter began healing people and casting out demons long before he "confessed" Jesus as the Christ. Action... action... action. Action comes first; understanding later.

Mark is a book of action. Jesus' followers discovered their master by experience. They began by doing what he did and saying what he said. In time, their minds would catch up. But to begin, they merely followed. So must we.

We become Jesus-followers in the same way. We do what Jesus is doing and say what Jesus is saying. I can borrow Jesus' specific words and use them in situations like those he faced when he lived on earth. As I leverage Jesus' words, Jesus himself works in and through me because Jesus and Jesus' words are one and the same.

I ask, "How do I be a Christian?" Simple: I put Jesus words to work in my life and through my life. Today it can begin.

Pressing questions frame the challenges we face. Jesus answers every one.

- Where is the devil attacking?
- Where is there sin – in my life and in the world?
- What is out of control?
- Where is there pain?
- What am I afraid of?
- Where is there a need?
- How can I endure?

Read Mark's Gospel with these questions in view. Watch Jesus closely. How does he address these basic human needs? As the stories unfold, imagine doing the same in your life.

The First Weapon

“Be quiet!” (Mark 1:25)

Where is the devil attacking you?

Your enemy talks. What will you do? His imps poison the air with white lies. “Loser!” one sneers. “Look, they’re laughing at you...” “She always gets her way...” “Go ahead, no one is looking...” “Why not, you deserve it...” “This will never work for you!” “Make him live to regret that...” Today will be noisy, inside your head and out. But what else do you expect in your war of words? Say something!

Jesus faced noisy days. In chapter one of Mark’s Gospel, a demon with no tongue of his own used a broken man to blaspheme. “What do you want with us? Have you come to destroy us?” it squealed. Jesus showed no tolerance. “Be quiet!” he said. “Come out!” The demon gagged, winced, and fled. Jesus turned and gave the man a new life.

“Be quiet” was enough. Just two words fired this shot heard round the universe. Jesus faced-down his foes directly, simply, and violently: “Let there be quiet!”

Your enemy is talking. What will you do? Talk back! Today you face noise. Your enemy intends to dismantle the world this way. “Let there *not* be...” he says. But you will not remain silent. You will not show mercy. You will borrow Jesus’ words in Jesus’ name and shut down the nonsense.

Answer envy: “Be quiet!” Answer suspicion: “Be quiet!” Answer distrust and fear and self-pity and lust and anger and gluttony and pride: “Be quiet!” Inside your own soul and on behalf of others, put these two words to work. Then rest easy.

Your mission: Listen carefully for the slightest deception. Listen for the inaudible, invisible source of the lies. When you identify your target, take aim. Then from under your breath let fly the borrowed words: “Be quiet!” Then rest as the racket dies away.

Question: “*Where is the devil attacking?*” Answer: “*Be quiet!*”

The Second Weapon

“Be clean!” (Mark 1:40)

Is there sin in your life?

“&^\$#@*?&er!” Your enemy hates you. He knows where to strike. He coins a word for every sin you’ve committed. “Thief.” “Coward.” “Lech.” “You’re %#x!?!*&ed and unclean!” He is right; and he has the right to say so. What you have done and left undone has corrupted creation. Every misstep is compounded into catastrophe. You are responsible for all the pain in the world.

A loathsome leper forced his way to Jesus. The despair of 40 generations was eating him alive. Unclean. Untouchable. Unbearable. But the man grew desperate. “Jesus, if you are willing you can make me clean.” “I am willing,” Jesus replied. Then he touched him. He *touched* him and became like a leper himself! “Be clean!” he said. And that was that.

“Be clean!” was enough. Basic algebra balanced the equation. Jesus exchanged heaven’s purity for a leper’s oozing sores. With that, the Son of God died in his place.

Your enemy has you on trial. He intends to sentence you to you to hell. “Guilty!” he scoffs. And how will you plead? Say what Jesus said. “Be clean!” and refute the charge.

Announce to your mind: “Be clean!” Announce to your eyes: “Be clean!” Announce to your tongue, your hands, your feet, your heart: “Be clean!” Inside your soul and on behalf of others, put these two words to work.

Your mission: Listen to the prosecutor’s case. Admit guilt, but do not accept the sentence. Plead the Great Exchange – his life for mine – and “Be clean!” Then watch as all liability washes down the drain of God’s forgetfulness.

Question: “*Where is there sin?*” Answer: “*Be clean!*”

The Third Weapon

“Be still!” (Mark 4:39)

What is out of control in your life?

Coup d'état! And The world runs wild! Finances inexplicably diminish Time slips away. Your body stiffens against your will. You sneeze, and detonate a hurricane. How easily the earth demolishes itself into chaos!

Jesus once slept through a storm. “Don’t you care?” his sea-wise companions yelled. He woke and spoke to the winds, “Peace, be still!” The winds remembered the Voice. They paused and returned obediently to a state of rest.

“Be still!” was enough. How easily the earth could destroy itself! And it would, but for two words: “Be still!” When Jesus talks, everything listens. As Creator, he holds everything back from smashing itself into bits.

“And where is your faith?” he asked his crew. Settling storms is assigned to Jesus-followers. He owns the world; but you and I manage day-to-day operations – with borrowed words. His words in our mouths are as His words in His.

Answer a confused mind: “Be still!” Answer a child’s tantrum: “Be still!” Answer disorderly closets, a bad memory, loose tongue, and foul moods: “Be still!” Gently, directly, persistently speak your peace: “Be still!” You don’t battle people or things; but the ruffian trying to destroy people and things. “Be still,” is all we need for storms that unsettle your world. “Be moved” is all we need for mountains in your way.

Your mission: Find the trouble that has found you. Walk into the eye of the storm and whisper two words borrowed from Jesus: “Be still!” That settles that!

Question: *“What is out of control?”* Answer: *“Be still!”*

The Fourth Weapon

“Be free!” (Mark 5:34)

“Where are you hurting?”

Swollen joints. Fever. Back spasms... Pain hurts. Pain is real. Pain is a pain. Pain is a sign something is wrong. Pain is a sign something is broken. Pain is the enemy of God. Pain is your enemy’s most effective idea. Pain is personal. Pain is prison. Yet pain can be cured. Pain will be cured because it already was, once and for all.

A suffering woman crawled to Jesus. She touched him and Jesus felt power transfer. He turned, saw her and said, “Be freed from your suffering!” Instantly, her broken body became whole; her disease fled from his command. She stood freely, and free!

“Be free!” was enough. Jesus’ simple, single edict put all scattered and tattered pieces together again.

Now you must enforce it. Your world hurts. What can you say? In the face of pain, “I’m sorry” or “That’s too bad” or “What a pity” are worse than saying nothing at all. Instead, when you observe pain, say something worth the breath it takes. Announce, “Be free!” One “Be free!” “sets free.”

Answer paralysis: “Be free!” Answer cancer: “Be free!” Answer arthritis, depression, diabetes, alcoholism, broken-heartedness, bi-polar disorder, any disorder: “Be free!” Disease flees at his command.

Your mission: Fix broken things. Your knapsack holds two words from Jesus: “Be free!” Dare look into the prison camp of human brokenness and suffering and with his words through your voice declare it liberated.

Question: *“Where is there hurt?”* Answer: *“Be free!”*

The Fifth Weapon

“Be not-afraid!” (Mark 6:50)

“What do you fear?”

Tomorrow will be dangerous. A car accident. A child’s cancer. A stock market crash. Dementia. Your enemy plots your demise. Surprise! This much is certain: What you don’t know can hurt you! The other shoe will drop. Bad things will happen. So what are you afraid of?

Jesus himself terrified people. Even those who knew him well never knew what to expect. That frightened them. One stormy night, Jesus walked across Lake Galilee. His boat-rowing followers imagined the worst. A demon? A ghost? Their own insanity? “Be not-afraid!” Jesus answered out of the gloom. “It is I.” Then he climbed into their boat and everything returned to normal. What relief!

“Be not-afraid!” was enough. Jesus’ pointed words struck at the heart of their fears. Fear turns the cogs of this world – until Jesus arrives! “Be not-afraid” does more than banish fear; it established faith in the face of danger.

Today you will face intimidation. Things you cannot identify will taunt from the shadows. The enemy will agitate your fight-or-flight instinct until your imagination runs scared. But terror must not bind you. Jesus is here! Borrow his words and intimidate the intimidator. “Be strong and courageous!” “Be not-afraid!”

Answer wild imaginations: “Be not-afraid!” Answer might-be and could-be: “Be not-afraid!” Answer threats of sickness, poverty, and abandonment: “Be not-afraid!” Answer tomorrow: “Be not-afraid!”

Your mission: Sniff out the rank odors of fear. You’ll find it in your own soul, and the soul of every person you meet. Search and find the pungent source. When you do, let fly your borrowed words: “Be not-afraid!” Relief!

Question: *“Where is there fear?”* Answer: *“Be not-afraid!”*

The Sixth Weapon

“Be opened” (Mark 7:34)

“What blocks communication?”

“The bladderman waggeder plost the alton plicker in a mastish plog of ferderic.” Babel makes aliens of us all. We hear noises, but only vaguely comprehend. We make noises, and only occasionally make sense. Communication is not difficult, it is impossible... until Jesus comes to clear the white noise.

A crowd brought Jesus a lonely man who could neither hear nor speak. If he had been stranded on a desert island, he could hardly have been more solitary. Jesus pulled him aside... to be alone with him. He put his fingers in the man’s ears, spit on his own hand and touched the man’s tongue. No words were exchanged. Then Jesus commanded, “Ephphatha!” “Be opened!” Immediately the man’s ears popped. He could hear. The next moment, his tongue was loosed. He could speak.

“Be opened” was enough. “For him who has ears to hear, let him hear!” Jesus boomed. And so, the miracle of communication and relationship is granted.

The enemy separates us from relationships. Oh, how he hates Jesus’ words of love and reconciliation! He stuffs ears and numbs tongues, fearing the power of words to create, connect, and call things that are not as though they were. He dreads words that become fresh; so he snuffs them at their source, or muddles them in flight, or ambushes them at their destination. Until Jesus speaks in response!

Answer misunderstanding: “Be opened!” Answer miscalculation: “Be opened!” Answer mistrust and missed opportunities and missing friendship, “Be opened!” Answer deaf ears and muted tongues and deadened communication, “Be opened.” Say so!

Your mission: Listen for words falling to the ground. Watch for the dull expressions of confusion and the empty stares of imprisoned souls. See bewilderment and deception for what they are – lies from hell! Hear the silence of hearts who cannot hear clear truth. Then break that silence with the gift of a healthy relationship. Speak Jesus’ words, “Be opened.” Then step back and listen as the reservoir of dammed up communication breaks loose!

Question: *“What blocks communication?”* Answer: *“Be opened!”*

The Seventh Weapon

“Be careful” (Mark 8:14)

“Where is temptation?”

Voices in your head riot. Your appetite throws tantrums. Fear hangs in the shadows feeding suspicion. Shame and pride slug it out. Envy agitates discontent. Haunting memories blast messages over the speaker system of your mind. Anger stokes fires in your heart. “Do this; don’t do that!” they say. Voices want to hold you hostage. Be careful!

Jesus’ followers panicked. They had forgotten food for their journey across the lake and feared they’d starve. “Be careful” Jesus warned. “Beware of thinking in finite terms. Beware of bad memory that ignores past provision. Beware alarm and its urge to manipulate circumstances. Beware thinking God is dead, or even that he is indifferent. There is plenty of food. I can simply make more! I’ve done it before. Beware the temptation of pessimism. Be very, very careful!

“Be careful!” was enough, or it should have been. Just two simple words from Jesus laid bare the deception of doubt. God is great and God is good. “Be careful” is plenty!

The devil lies when he says you are self-sustained. He force-feeds this lie into your instinctive fear of starvation, and tempts you into desperate independence. Your spirit is willing, to be sure, but your flesh is weak. We are all prone to expect the worst. Beware the temptation of pessimism!

Solution: Stand and borrow words from Jesus. Rebuke panic, “Be careful!” Tame your instincts of hunger, sex, and survival with “Be careful!” Manage your imagination, reason, intuition, and memory with “Be careful!” Do not conform to the pattern of pessimism. Renew your mind with Jesus’ reminder, “Be careful!” Then relax; he has plenty.

Your mission: “Know yourself.” Anticipate your own unique brand of pessimism. Study your own weaknesses and prepare to resist the temptations tailored to weaken your resolve. When you see the slightest drift toward panic step up and say, “Be careful!” “Be careful!” “Be careful!” Say it. Say it until the pressure to expect the worst falls back into the pit of hell from which it comes.

Question: *“Where is there temptation?”* Answer: *“Be careful!”*

The Eighth Weapon

“Be yours” (Mark 11:24)

“What do you need?”

The enemy is your thief. You shall want. He makes you lie down in desolate places. He leaves you beside cesspools of deprivation. He devours your hope. He guides you down alleyways of empty promises for the sake of his own perverted pleasure. You shall want.

“Have faith in God,” Jesus answered back. “I’m shooting straight with you. If anyone tells this mountain, ‘Go, dump yourself in the ocean,’ and inside his heart does not doubt, but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. So, this is what I’m saying, whatever you ask of God, believe that you have already received it, and in reality it will be yours.” “Be yours!” “Be yours!” Jesus promised.

“Be yours!” was enough. It was enough for more bread and fish. It was enough for the water to become wine. It was enough to put a gold piece into a fish’s mouth. “Be yours!” brings enough. For the Lord is your shepherd. You shall *not* want.

The thief is taunting you with poverty-words. Never enough time. Never enough money. Never enough energy. He talks a “zero-sum game” of scarcity. But you will borrow Jesus’ words and set them loose to work the wonder of multiplication. Never again, “never enough.”

Answer the poverty mindset: “Be yours!” Answer real lack: “Be yours!” Answer debt and hunger and fear and self-pity and pride and anger and worry: “Be yours!” Fight poverty with words. Put Jesus to the test. Rest.

Your mission: Make a promise on behalf of Jesus. Find a need. Fill it with his words: “Be yours!”

Question: *“What do you need?”* Answer: *“Be yours!”*

The Ninth Weapon

“Be alert” (Mark 13:33)

“Are you weary?”

It’s been a long wait. And the wait may continue. In the meantime, your enemy lulls you. Apathy is the poison. A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands, and wham! You never wake up! So while you can, arise, and finish strong!

Urgency compelled Jesus on toward Jerusalem. He was going on purpose. His followers straggled behind. Along the way he warned them, “Be alert! It could be a long haul. You can never predict the hour when history will reach its climax. Stay on your guard. Keep watch. Keep the pace. Be alert.”

His two-word reveille: “Be alert!” By “Be alert!” Jesus meant, “Pay attention.” Pay, or pay with your life! Your enemy stalks like a lion. He devours sluggards who let down their guard. In the meantime it’s do, or die. So do be alert!”

Alertness is rest on a mission. In deliberate stillness, you focus and observe variations in the world. You evaluate these variations and discriminate between chance and design. Then you can decide how to act. With two borrowed words you call yourself and others to attention.

Answer boredom: “Be alert!” Answer impatience: “Be alert!” Answer tedium: “Be alert!” Answer exhaustion: “Be alert!” Answer distractions: “Be alert!” It is getting late.

Your mission: Find sleepiness, sloppiness, weariness, and uncertainty inside your own slacking soul, or in the lagging eyes of a friend. Wherever, blast a trumpet warning loud and strong: “Be alert!” You’ve come this far. Finish strong!

Question: *“Are you weary?”* Answer: *“Be alert!”*

Holding ground

Is the battle won? Yes, indeed. But are things now in perfect peace? Hardly! Now that you have begun to fight, and you know the ways to victory, persevere and hold the ground you've gained.

How? Begin by re-reading and re-re-reading *Mark's Gospel*. Repeat this simple prayer process again and now begin the discipline of asking, "What do I say now?"

- Observe.
- Assess.
- Diagnose.
- Say the right thing.
- Observe again and adapt.

Then, find someone else who needs to know, and teach them to fight like Jesus!