

Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”
Isaiah 40:31*



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Discouraging Words

Like Israel on the border of Canaan, a local church can be easily led into a path of despair and unbelief, if people are careless in the words they speak to each other.

“Nevertheless my brethren who went up with me made the heart of the people melt, but I wholly followed the Lord my God” (Josh. 14:8).

It had been 45 years since the incident at Kadesh Barnea, but Caleb could still remember it like it was yesterday. He and his fellow spies had returned from reconnoitering the land of Canaan. They all agreed that the land was plentiful, but they were divided in their opinion of whether or not Israel could take the land. Caleb and Joshua insisted that—with God’s help—Israel could take it. But the other ten spies believed it was impossible; the massive fortresses and swarms of powerful enemies would be too much for Israel to overcome.

The words of the ten spies had a devastating effect on the morale of the people. According to Caleb, they “made the heart of the people melt.” Like soft wax on a hot day, the enthusiasm of the people for the whole enterprise melted when they heard this report. They turned against God and Moses and refused to enter the land. God consigned them to forty years of wandering in the wilder-

ness while that generation died off. Only Caleb and Joshua survived their peers to see the Promised Land.

Think about the significance of what happened here. The words of just ten men led an entire nation into despair, resulting in the loss of an entire generation. It took the nation decades to recover from the debacle.

What did these men say that created such a disastrous outcome? First, they *exaggerated the risks* (“the land devours its inhabitants . . . the men are of great stature,” Num. 13:32). Second, they *minimized the opportunities* (“We are not able,” v. 30; “we were like grasshoppers,” v. 33). It was a heavy dose of negativity that Caleb and Joshua could not overcome. God had promised the people victory, but the defeatist counsel of ten men destroyed their faith and blinded them to the possibility of success.

The words that we speak can have an enormous—and often unintended—impact on the spirits of those around us, especially if our comments are negative or disparaging. That’s why we need to be careful when sharing our concerns.

For example, a preacher has a duty to deal frankly with sin in his preaching and teaching. But incessant attacks on sin can unwittingly cause people to despair of ever winning the battle against sin in their own lives. Preaching against sin must be balanced with a positive message of grace and forgiveness.

Elders should always be honest about the challenges facing a congregation. But they should balance that assessment with the opportunities that lie before the group. God’s people can overcome great challenges, if led by optimistic men with a positive vision.

Members can spread discouragement through a congregation by careless sharing of their doom-and-gloom opinions. A church is better served by members who prefer to encourage others instead of amplifying the problems.

We live in an imperfect world; that’s a fact we cannot ignore. But in addressing the problems of life, we need to be extremely careful that our words do not cause the hearts of those around us to melt. Our goal is not to discourage one another, but to lift each other up.

– David King