

well said*

* Choosing Words that Speak Life,
Give Grace, and Strengthen
Your Faith and Family

FOREWORD BY ABBIE HALBERSTADT

SARAH MOLITOR

CREATOR OF MODERN FARMHOUSE FAMILY

With vulnerability and wisdom on every page, Sarah points to the path of life when it comes to our words. *Well Said* encourages us with Scripture, stories, and practical tips on how to take care of our hearts so we can take care of our words. Every house will benefit from this book!

AMY SEIFFERT, author of *Starved* and *Grace Looks Amazing on You*

“Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words shall never hurt me.” Wrong. Words stick with us—sometimes forever. Sarah offers a beautiful reminder of why and how to speak with intention every single day.

LESLIE MEANS, founder of Her View from Home and author of *So God Made a Mother*

Words are hard. They can either be life-giving or fire-setting. In a time when thoughtless words can be spoken (or posted) to the masses in a matter of seconds, it is more important than ever for us to carefully harness our speech for the good of others and the glory of God. If you, like me, have ever struggled with taming your tongue, then Sarah is just the friend you need! Her vulnerability and warmth in *Well Said* will meet you right where you are and lead you to the One who always speaks in perfect love.

NAOMI VACARO, author of *Quiet* and founder of Wholehearted

In a tinderbox culture, every word is a match, so this book on developing God’s way with words is both timely and important. Anything but preachy, Sarah opens up the vault of her own life to share honestly from her wins and losses. If the wise use of words feels like an uphill battle, you’ll find hope, courage, and practical help inside these lovely pages.

BO STERN BRADY, author of *Beautiful Battlefields*

This book is beautiful and impactful with a powerful message. It's filled with engaging real-life stories that bring out amazing lessons of truth. Definitely a great read!

JENESSA WAIT, social media influencer

Powerful yet practical, Sarah gives the road map we all need when we've reached a bump in the road and our native tongue has become critical, unkind, and dishonoring. Not only will you find a friend in Sarah who just GETS US in every page, but you'll walk away with your chin up, knowing your gracious God longs to set you free, and He's given you words to speak as a gift to build others up. Hands down an encouraging must-read for any Christian woman who longs to speak life to those around her. Indeed . . . well said.

HEIDI LEE ANDERSON, author of *P.S. It's Gonna Be Good* and
Christian content creator @HeidiLeeAnderson and @ThisMotherHen

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SARAH MOLITOR



A Tyndale nonfiction imprint

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication data can be found at www.loc.gov.

ISBN 978-1-4964-6697-6

Printed in the United States of America

29 28 27 26 25 24 23
7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To my hunk of a husband, Tim. This book is because of you! Your unwavering commitment in our marriage and in my lows and highs encourages me to never stay stuck. You are the dreamer, our “goal” guy, and the visionary for our family. For that (and much MUCH more) I am grateful.

I love you, I love you, I love you—with all of my heart.

Forever, your Sweet!



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Foreword

As a longtime veteran of blogging and social media (I've been at it for more than a dozen years!), I have noticed a tendency toward self-aggrandizement and insincerity in “content creators”—including in myself at times. It is a genuine (sometimes downright scary) risk to reveal one's authentic self to thousands of strangers, some of whom *might* not have your best interest at heart. And yet, if we desire unfeigned connection with our readers and to be a real encouragement to them, we *must* choose to lay aside a facade of perfection and present the truth to them: we are sinners, saved by the grace of God, and the only thing we *truly* have figured out is that His strength is sufficient for us, even when our own peters out about five minutes after our eyes flutter open to the sound of our three-year-old's mouth-breathing in our faces each morning.

Encountering those who are willing to lay aside an impression of “having it all together” (which is different, by the way, than “letting it all hang out”) for the sake of conveying this truth is rare, and I find myself inexorably drawn toward those glimmers of genuine gold whenever they catch my eye. Praise

God, He has been faithful to bless my motherhood journey (after *years* of praying and waiting) with glittering nuggets of refreshment through the treasure of friendship with life-speaking, truth-telling, Jesus-loving women, both face-to-face and online.

Sarah Molitor is one such gem.

Whether through the evident joy she finds in her family, her delight in her husband, her obvious affection for her readers (witnessing her dedication to shutting her eyes tight and praying with them—free of affectation or vanity—on social media every Sunday night always brings a lump of gratitude to my throat for her example), her authenticity *shines*, and her passion for Jesus urges me on in my own walk.

I'll admit to being surprised when Sarah confessed her own struggle to speak words of life because I have been the happy recipient of Sarah's timely encouragement on numerous occasions. (She is quick to cheer her social media peers on with the kind of abandon that is usually reserved for a proud auntie.) She exudes an unselfconscious thrill in others' achievements that every woman should strive to emulate.

And yet! I am also not surprised. It is so often those who have experienced the bitterest struggles in an area of enslavement to sin who emerge with the most joy at its overcoming. Jesus puts it like this in Luke 7:47 (ESV): "Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little."

Y'all, let me be clear: that's *all* of us. We have all disobeyed God's law in egregious ways. ALL of our (perceived) righteousness is like a pile of dirty rags we just used to scrub that terrible, filth-covered bathroom at the public park. (Isaiah 64:6 confirms this.) In that passage in Luke 7, Jesus is emphasizing our

recognition of our need for a Savior—and the subsequent gratitude and love for Him that well up in our hearts upon realizing the depth of the miserable mire from which he has rescued us.

In sharing her story of redemption from the pit of discontentment and bitter speech, Sarah is offering not just relatability—the benefits of which are short-lived—but the *hope* of Jesus, which, as Romans 5:5 (NASB) assures us, “does not disappoint.”

I know you will be encouraged as much as I am by Sarah’s example of vulnerability coupled with a tenacious resolve to “do better” in Christ’s strength. She urges us to walk with her in practical steps of dogged, habit-building obedience to the Lord and to *rejoice* with her in the victory that Jesus has offered her and which He holds out to each of us who will lift our eyes from our hurt, our addictions, and our self-obsession to look fully in His wonderful face.

Abbie Halberstadt
bestselling author of
M Is for Mama



How It All Started

I STILL REMEMBER THE TASTE of the sock in my mouth. To this day, I hope the sock was clean (I think it was), but I'm not entirely convinced. Either way, it did its intended job. I don't exactly recall what led to that point. All I know is that one moment I was chattering my mouth off (probably when I was supposed to be quiet), and the next, my mouth was full of sock—from none other than my beloved third-grade teacher, Mrs. Fig. Her strategy was swift and effective. Trust me, once you're forced to hold a hopefully clean sock in your mouth for a whole three minutes, you'll think twice about talking too much next time.

And that, my friends, was one of my first lessons in taming my tongue. I wouldn't exactly call it appropriate . . . but memorable? Clearly. Many moments like these have shaped my journey of knowing when to use my words—and when to keep my mouth shut.

I'm Sarah, by the way. I'm a chatterbox by nature, which I admit has gotten me into some trouble. But it has also created some of the best opportunities in my life. My husband, Tim, and I have six little boys and one little girl who are our joy joy joy joy

joy joy joy! Being a mother is one of my absolute biggest gifts. Since I wrote *Well Said* right before our daughter was born, you'll only see my sons' names throughout the book. Let me introduce all our children. Jude is our oldest, followed by Hudson and then Chase. Next is Crew and then Beck. Followed by Griffy. And Lucy rounds out the bunch! As you can imagine, our house is a mix of nonstop energy, fun, a whole lot of food, and many wonderful moments. When people come over, I always tell them, "No individual thing we own is sacred—we have seven children! So make yourself comfortable, relaxed, and at home."

We consider ourselves social people, and we love spending time with others. Want to know something cool? Over the past few years, Tim, the boys, and I have had the unique opportunity to share bits of our lives via social media and my blog. Our goal with these platforms is to spread Jesus' love and our love for others through Him—and to be a source of encouragement and hospitality for our community there. It's nothing we ever set out to do, but I suppose that's what makes it a God thing and not an "us" thing. Which I'm so thankful for.

Safe to say, everything we do is connected to the words we use daily. Just like you! Maybe, like me, you've had moments when your words have gotten the better of you. Maybe you knew how much something would hurt, but you said it anyway because it felt good in the moment. Maybe you don't struggle with saying unkind things, but you aren't using your words to their full potential to speak life into yourself and those around you. Or maybe you are struggling to find time to read and soak up (or obey) God's Word, and you want that to change. Whatever your "maybe" may be, I believe you are in the right place.

I have seen victory in the area of my words, but I'm still on this journey. Sure, I have overcome so much in this area. *So*

much. Thank you, Jesus! I've done the hard work to experience freedom in this part of my life. I'm not 100 percent free in it, though. Not in myself, at least. But with God on my side? I can walk—and have been walking—in freedom. Freedom plus redemption plus grace plus forgiveness. I need all of it, and I utilize all of it. My hope is that this book will show you what it looks like to pursue freedom, grace, and redemption in the area of words and communication. My life is still littered with moments here and there where my tongue gets ahead of me and I say something I shouldn't—but the good news is I don't have to stay there. Neither do you. I say that because I have an inkling I'm not alone in this. I can't be the only woman, the only wife, the only mother, the only friend, the only daughter who has ever used her words in an unglorifying manner.

And that's why I'm sharing my story and why you are here. As a certified conversationalist (aka chatterbox), what better book to write than one about words? In these pages, I'll share what I've learned and am still learning today. I want to encourage you wherever you're at. I'll tell my story of redemption and how the way I communicate has been transformed (and Lord, help that to continue). I've learned the hard way that “the tongue can bring death or life; those who love to talk will reap the consequences” (Proverbs 18:21). But I've also seen the Lord do incredible things in my heart that have created a ripple effect on those around me.

As we journey together, my prayer is that my words are more than just relatable and resonating. I pray that they speak the heart of Jesus—specifically, His heart for your life. There will also be actionable steps and encouragements rooted in Scripture and biblical truth. The words I write are just words. But those

verses of Scripture I've chosen to share are God-breathed truth that will sustain you far longer than my words will.

This journey isn't always going to be pretty, but a lot of it will be healing. This book is a way to point us all toward Jesus and help us get to a place of using our words intentionally to speak life into others. Not because we walk around like Positive Pollys but because of what Jesus is doing in our hearts.

Most of all, I want to be a friend who walks with you and encourages you along the way. By the end of this book, I believe you will be equipped to step into a new season of your story. Let's start moving forward—together.

*XO,
Sarah*

Maybe It's a Heart Issue

“WHATEVER, TIM. DO WHAT YOU WANT!” I huffed and puffed in annoyance.

“I asked nicely,” he replied. “It’s not a big deal if I don’t go. I just wanted to see if you would be okay with it.”

“You’re always so perfect, aren’t you? You frame everything so nicely and put me on the spot so that it’s all my fault, no matter how I answer. I’m the bad guy either way.” To say I spoke in a condescending tone would be putting it mildly. “Sure, go ahead. Why not? You get *everything* you want in life,” I continued. “You got a wife, you get to live in your hometown, you have all your friends here, you live by your family, you can go out whenever and not be tied down to a nursing baby. . . . It must be *so nice* to have it all, be comfortable in life, and do whatever you want while I sit here away from everything I knew and loved. I’ve sacrificed a ton.” At this point, I was speaking through tears. They were genuine tears, but the motivation

behind my words was less than desirable and aimed to elicit a response. So I let my rage continue building. “And then I’m home all day managing our house and kids while you get to go everywhere and do whatever you want.” Maybe some of these points were valid, but none of what I said had anything to do with the real issue. My heart issue.

I was just warming up, to be honest. I had hit a low. Actually, a lower than low. By this point, I had been on my way there for years. It had been a gradual decline, but now I was stuck in a pit I had dug for myself. If I was going to be miserable, I decided I would make the one I most loved miserable too. Only seems fair, right?



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with the real issue. My heart issue.

“That’s not true,” he replied. He was fighting back the tears himself, and I could see the hurt settling on his face. “Sarah, what if I said to you what you are saying to me? You would be a mess and never want to speak to me again. It’s really hurtful.”

That’s the last thing either of us said that night. I was angry, bitter, and on a rampage. He was upset yet still trying to be gracious, even though he didn’t have much grace left to give.

But before I take you to the bottom of my pit and share all the cringy details, let’s go back in time a bit.

The Prequel

It was the summer of 2004. I was seventeen. And this is already starting to sound like a country song. Life had been pretty good until that day. To be honest, life was pretty good after that day. But that one day. It was a doozy. And *not what* I was expecting.

At the time, I was pretty close to one particular friend, but we were different in many ways. And that summer day showed just *how* different. We had spent a lot of time together during high school, playing sports and hanging out. She came from a family with divorced parents, and the situation had left her struggling with bitterness. That summer, I hadn't seen as much of her as usual. When I arrived home from an out-of-town softball tournament that day, a letter was waiting for me. It was from this friend, and it spanned three pages.

I'll spare you all the details, but essentially it was an "I really don't like you" letter—and that's putting it nicely. My friend was so upset that I'd chosen to pursue college athletics instead of hanging out with her and our other friends that she decided I wasn't a true friend after all. And she filled three pages with everything she could think of that she didn't like about me. Every little thing. She might as well have said she didn't like how I cut my toenails. Maybe she did. Even at seventeen, I knew the letter was her way of projecting her bitterness and resentment onto me.

I read it once and cried. Mean words hurt. If you say they don't, you are lying to yourself. I folded up the letter, stuffed it in my pocket, and headed to youth group that night as usual. At youth group, I learned another valuable lesson—but not from

the youth pastor. It came from a girl in her early twenties who helped each week. She was like a big sister to me. I was on the verge of tears as she came up to me that evening, so I showed her the letter and told her all about it. You know what's interesting? She didn't even read it all. She opened it, glanced at it, and folded it right back up. I'll never forget what she said to me.

"Sarah, this letter is dumb. It has nothing to do with you and everything to do with the person who wrote it. This isn't about you. Yes, the words hurt, but you are not going to read them again. They do not define you, and you can't let them pull you down from what God is doing in your life. Don't give this letter any more space. It doesn't deserve it."

Wow! Looking back, I'm so thankful for her wisdom. This "big sister" may not have had many years of experience under her belt, but she knew how to gently guide and expose the tongue for what it is: a loose cannon that anyone can wield with their own motivations. After our conversation, I resolved never to use my words to hurt others I love.

Unfortunately, we often allow ourselves to forget what we have gone through, and we end up digging our own pit. And sometimes, we begin to justify our behavior under the guise of self-pity. At least that was the case for me.

Playing Favorites

Fast-forward four years, and my life was about to change. I met the love of my life, and I knew it from the day we hiked a mountain with friends. As we flirted up and down the mountain, Tim said something like "I'm not ready to settle down. . . . I'd love to travel the world."

To which I replied, "It'd be way better to travel married to

someone you love than all alone.” I know—catchy, right? Well, it worked. From that day, we were hooked and twitterpated. Dating seemed like a formality, and we were engaged in five months. Nine months after that, between my years of nursing school, we married!

I’m not generally one to pick favorites . . . but Tim is my favorite. I know, I know, that might sound pretty different from the story I began at the start of this chapter. But stay with me. My story *is* redemptive (and spoiler alert: your story can be redemptive too)!

As I was saying, Tim wins the award for “favorite” in every category I can apply it to. Favorite smile. Favorite dad. Favorite laugh. Favorite hype guy. Favorite food eater (he’s the guy everyone wants to cook for because he loves food and makes you feel good with his natural kindness and compliments, even if your cooking’s not the best). Tim’s also my favorite person to adventure with. I know I may not adventure much in the rugged sense, but hey, I still pick him when I do! He’s also my favorite backward-hat-wearing guy (you know it’s my favorite, babe!). Favorite breakfast maker. Favorite piano player, even though all he can play is “My Heart Will Go On” from *Titanic*. I’m swooning just thinking about it. Gets me every time. (Could be a possible contributor to why we have so many children . . .) Tim is my favorite everything.

Early on in our marriage, I decided to surprise him with a gift he’d been wanting: a surround-sound system for our TV. (This was back around 2016, when surround-sound systems were still comprised of several huge speakers you strategically placed around the room for the best effect.) I saved and saved and finally decided to splurge on one for his birthday.

When Tim opened it, he was floored. What he said next was

a riot, and I still remember it clear as day. “Oh, my goodness, babe, this is amazing! *Wow!* You are the best wife I’ve ever had!”

One of my sisters was there, and she and I could not stop laughing. He didn’t realize what he’d said until I replied, “I’m the only wife you’ve ever had!” I knew what he meant, but to this day, I still joke with him that I’m the best wife he’s ever had! And that reaction is just the type of joy Tim emanates.

Moving Away

Hold on to your hats, friends, because I’m about to speed walk you through the first five years of our marriage. This walk (er, sprint) down memory lane will give the necessary context for the moment I officially hit the bottom of my self-dug pit.

One year after we were married, we were finally able to live full time together. *Hallelujah!* If you count our time dating long distance—ish, we’d seen each other only on weekends for almost twenty-two months of our relationship. After our wedding, I was still in nursing school full time, and Tim was working to support us. So we had this tiny basement apartment that we lived in together on the weekends, and on weeknights, I stayed at my parents’ house and Tim stayed at *his* parents’ house. Once I finally graduated, we packed up everything and moved to his hometown one day later.

It was all a whirlwind, and I was sad, to tell you the truth. Don’t get me wrong—I was *thrilled* to finally be with my husband Sunday to Sunday. I mean, I hardly knew what he was like on a Tuesday, and I was excited to find out. He didn’t disappoint, but my surroundings sure did. Moving from mountainous terrain with loads of green trees and forest to the dry flatlands was a shocker. We weren’t in Oregon anymore. This

was the desert. And down the road of our life (years down the road), that sentiment and feeling would become just as metaphorical as they were literal.

The farther we drove from my hometown, the more permanent it felt. The day had come, and I'd convinced myself I still wasn't "ready." Whatever that means. I've since learned that "feeling ready" really isn't a good indicator of anything. Was I ready to get married and become a wife? Was I ready to become a full-time registered nurse responsible for people's health and well-being at twenty-two? Was I ready when they placed our first child in my arms? Or when my parents drove away after our first baby was born, leaving me with a freezer full of food and lots of hugs and tears as I held our sweet new baby in our house all alone? And will I be ready when I'm an empty nester and life shifts into a different season?

Whatever ideas you have for being ready probably won't ever prepare you for the season you are entering. I sure felt unprepared for that move: leaving my hometown, leaving my friends, leaving the church I loved, and most of all, leaving my family. I know 210 miles isn't exactly earth-shattering, but it felt that way. I cried the whole drive. Okay, I sobbed. (Luckily for Tim, I've improved my passenger skills and now love to talk his ear off on any long drive we take!) Tim sat there in silence, occasionally trying to comfort me, probably unsure what to say to his wife, who was sobbing for a full three-hour car ride. Probably not much he could've said anyway.

Little did I know that this was the beginning of a new me I had never really known—and not a me I would want to be friends with. Not a me I would want to be married to. It was also the beginning of letting my emotions get bigger than my self-control in lots of areas—but mainly in communicating with my words.

Temporary Band-Aids

In that first year after moving, a lot happened. I landed a job as a registered nurse, and it was a great start. We moved into a little cottage in Tim's parents' front yard. Yes, you read that right. Their front yard! I felt extremely lonely during those first few months in my new town, far from my friends, parents, and sisters. So I did what any normal girl would do. I started looking for a puppy. *Surely a puppy will cure everything*, I thought. Rather quickly, at a dog shelter, I found the cutest little pup looking for a home. Looking for *me*! I was sure of it. And somehow, by the grace of God, I convinced Tim to be sure of it as well.

Within a week of locating the puppy, we picked her up. It was puppy love at first sight. Tim held her out like Simba in *The Lion King* and said, "Do you want to come home with me?" Within a second, he was covered in puppy potty. I just laughed. Maybe the pup was nervous, or maybe it was her way of saying, *Take me home!* Either way, we knew she'd be ours.

For a little bit, Gibbsy the pup took away all my growing discontentment and loneliness. My attention was on her, and I was happy. But puppy happiness wears off. After all, everyone knows puppies don't keep. Gibbsy was amazing, but she didn't solve the underlying issues I was trying to ignore. She was just a Band-Aid. A Band-Aid covering a tiny wound that would soon grow bigger. A Band-Aid that soothed and distracted but didn't heal.

After two months in the cottage, we started looking at houses. We got an incredible opportunity through Tim's parents to buy some affordable land and build our very first home. It was hard to believe, but within a few months, we excitedly

began the build. We picked out paint and flooring and appliances and light fixtures and every little detail since we were our own general contractors to save money. I don't think I want to spend that much time looking at toilets ever again!

Within seven months, we were in our beautiful new home. Custom built, special just for us—a joy. Yet somehow, I still didn't feel the happiness I thought I was supposed to. Instead, I felt my discontentment continuing to grow slowly but surely. It began to manifest through my words, a little here and a little there. I started making comments that let Tim know how I felt. And in the beginning, he would take it. I played the victim by wielding my words and making him feel just bad enough to apologize. I'm cringing as I type this, but it's true.

Building a house was fun, but much like our puppy, it was just another Band-Aid on a slow-growing issue in my heart. I knew deep down these Band-Aids wouldn't solve anything. They were just a temporary fix. Despite this knowledge, I did nothing to deal with my heart (and mouth) issues. It only seemed right and fair in my mind that Tim should bear at least some of the blame for how I felt. After all, we lived in *his* hometown. Close to *his* family, *his* friends, *his* favorite restaurants. Instead of communicating with Tim in an honest but kind way or finding someone I trusted and letting them know where I was at, I continued to justify my feelings and words to myself. Mind you, it wasn't all day, every day. We had lots of love, too. But it happened enough to matter.

Faulty Feelings

Whew. I bet you are starting to see where this is going. Your situation may not exactly line up with mine, but you may know

all the same feelings. It doesn't feel fair, friend, does it? But it was exactly this type of reasoning and rationalizing that continued to enable how I chose to speak to Tim. I was doing it because I *wanted* things to feel fair.

Feelings aren't bad; it's just that they can sometimes be faulty. God designed us with feelings, after all. And when they're healthy and in their proper place, feelings can be helpful. They help us grieve; they help us rejoice; they help us empathize and love. But here's a great reminder from the Bible that applies when our feelings get the best of us. I wish I had read this and understood it during my season of struggle. "My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (Psalm 73:26, NIV).

If we let them, our emotions can control everything in our lives. Feelings are like the wind. They come and go. Sometimes they feel like a horrific swirling, whirling windstorm that we can't see through. Other times they rush in out of nowhere, leaving as quickly as they came but blowing us off course. Sometimes they're like a breeze that sticks around for several days, just constant enough to be felt. Can you picture your feelings like that?

Here's the truth: however our feelings blow in, I can guarantee they will blow out just the same. Yet sometimes, we put too much stock in those momentary feelings. I know I did. I still do, sometimes.

Something More

The year we moved into our new house, we decided we wanted to start our family. I didn't get pregnant the first month. Or the second month. Or the third . . . not until month ten. Those

ten months of trying to conceive a child only contributed to my discontented feelings. I was building a good ole stockpile at that point.

But at last, we got the joyous news via two little pink lines. I was *thrilled*. I'd always wanted to be a mother, and Tim and I couldn't wait to welcome this little one. We told our whole family around Christmastime, and everyone was thrilled alongside us.

Several months later, we had our first sweet baby boy, Jude Timothy—our Judebug, as we affectionately called him (and still do). After an incredibly rough delivery, I left the hospital, barely able to walk, with our sweet boy in my arms. As much as I'd like to say those first six months postbaby were bliss, they were actually the opposite. Jude was amazing, and Tim and I were adapting to parenthood fairly well, but I had a hard time recovering physically.

Yet again, I found myself with another Band-Aid—a very cute one, but a Band-Aid nonetheless. I now had not only my dream husband, our sweet dog, and our beautiful home but also a baby boy, who was the biggest gift I could imagine. In reality, there were plenty of good things around me. I just wasn't letting them be fulfilling, because I only wanted to see one narrative. *My* narrative.

I always wanted something more. Whatever that something was. I wanted everything I already had *and* to live near my family again. *And* to be back at my old church. And, and, and! I allowed my discontented feelings to stick around and take an even firmer hold on my life. The way I spoke to Tim continued to get worse and more frequent. Sometimes it was a casual jab at little things that annoyed me, while other times it snowballed into everything I couldn't stand and how I “must be right” because otherwise,

I wouldn't feel the need to tell him. What began as an occasional chipping away at him turned into a fairly consistent nagging. Which led to even more discontentment. Which led to a total lack of respect for Tim as my husband and a gift God had given me.

In the spring of 2014, we welcomed our second baby boy, Hudson Clark. All six pounds of him were pure joy, and he looked just like his older brother (minus two pounds). He was perfect. Life was bliss for those first few moments, fueled by postpartum hormones and happiness. All was right with our world. My parents helped us transition that first week to a family of four, and I felt so seen and taken care of. But then they had to go home, and once again I was in a new season of adjustment.

Slowly but surely, as the newborn bliss faded, life also seemed to fade back into "normal." My new normal, that is. Tim resumed work and his other activities, and I tried to figure out how to manage a newborn and a toddler with vastly different daily needs. I was bitter about Tim getting out of the house all the time (even if it was just for work). Bitter anytime he wanted to go do something fun that I couldn't participate in because I had a baby to nurse and put down for a nap. Bitter whenever he couldn't predict exactly what I was thinking—though it feels silly even typing that now! Can you relate?

I'm not sure *discontentment* fully encompasses what I felt during this season. It was a mixture of dissatisfaction (with where I was living), resentment (for being pulled away from my family), envy (for all Tim was able to do kid free), impatience (for not feeling the way I wanted to feel), and irritation (at myself for how I acted, even though I did nothing to change it). I sound like a real peach, don't I?

One evening, Tim was being his normal wonderful self (here, I'm being serious—his personality is all joy!). And I was being my normal peachy self (here, I'm being sarcastic).

“Hey, do you mind if I go to a movie tonight with my brothers?” he asked. “Is that okay?”

Do I mind? *Do I mind?* That's the moment I lost it.

All My Rage

That night, there was a blowout—and I don't mean a diaper kind of blowout. No, I'm talking about a blowout of every pent-up feeling I had. In my head, I had prepared for this battle and was ready to attack. Like a lion stalking its prey, I had just been waiting for Tim to do or say something I didn't like. It didn't really matter what it was; I'd just needed a launching point. He probably could've asked if it was okay if he just walked outside to breathe fresh air. As I said, I was a real peach. I'd decided ahead of time that whatever he did, he was already wrong and I was right.

Right about all the things I had stored in my head over the years leading up to this night. Right about being ignored, right about feeling left out, right about him not caring like I wanted him to, right about missing my family, right that it was somehow his fault. Right about it all! So when I had the chance, I let all my feelings spew. As I had done so often before, I let my emotions take the reins. But this time, I exploded. I let him have it. Every unkind thing I could think of (without swearing), I probably said. I didn't hold back because now was my time to shine. This was it. The climax. All my feelings coming out fully, with no checks, balances, or accountability. Watch out, Tim . . . here comes Sarah in all her glory (eek)!

Proverbs 13:3 says, “Those who guard their lips preserve their lives, but those who speak rashly will come to ruin” (NIV). Ruin! When all was said and done over the course of just a few minutes, in the midst of my rage, I suddenly felt the ruin. And I’m sure it was worse for Tim. He headed out to the yard to give me a break since nothing he could do or say would resolve what I had started. In reality, this battle had nothing to do with Tim and everything to do with me. It also had everything to do with Ephesians 6:12, which says, “We are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.”

I know this verse might throw some people for a loop with terms like “evil rulers,” “unseen world,” “mighty powers,” and “dark world.” But here’s the thing: there is a real enemy out there—the devil—who really wants to take you down. And one of the quickest ways he can do his dirty work is through division. So, no, Tim wasn’t the problem. The problem was an enemy who wants to see our marriage crumble and dissolve. It’s him we fight against—not each other. Of course, it’s a whole lot easier to recognize this now, but I struggled to acknowledge it then.

I Wasn’t Expecting *That*

After the blowout, I did the only thing I could think of and called my mom. I knew she would understand, and I just wanted someone to validate my feelings and be on my side. *Surely she’ll get it*, I thought, as the phone rang. Through tears and with a baby in my arms, I told her that Tim and I had just had a big fight. Between my sniffing and sobbing, I told her everything that had happened.

I don't think we were even two minutes into the phone call when she said, "Sarah, Dad wants me to hand him the phone so he can talk to you." Apparently, he heard enough to want to step in.

This was great. Dad—a man of wisdom (as evidenced by his gray hair and favorite Bible verse, Proverbs 16:31). *He will totally take my side.* Boy, was I mistaken. What I thought was going to be an "I have your back because you're my daughter" conversation ended up being a conversation that gave me a kick in the pants and caused me to begin a long road of healing.

His response was nothing I expected and everything I needed. First, he listened intently as I laid out my side of the story and all that was on my heart and mind. I even went back a few years to try to build a case for myself.

Then he said something like this: "I hear you, and now it's my turn, okay? I'm going to tell you some things I've noticed, and you probably aren't going to like it. . . . Are you ready?"

For some reason (I blame it on the Holy Spirit and my conscience), even though everything in me felt broken and ruined, I was ready to hear whatever he had to say. Even if it hurt. It was like I knew I needed change; I just couldn't get there on my own.

As my dad spoke to me gently but firmly, he told me what he'd been noticing in my life. The discontentment, the lack of joy, and the bitterness mixed with resentment and disrespect. He said something then that I now catch myself saying to my boys approximately fifty-eight times per day (give or take): "Who controls you and your actions? Who controls your emotions? And who controls your responses?"

My response in my head? *Me . . . me . . . and again, me!* You see, I'm well aware there isn't a puppet master in the sky forcing me to say and do things against my will. No. God didn't create

us that way. He gave us free will and choices. Because He loves us and wants us to choose right, not to be forced into it.

My dad's very obvious point was: How could I blame Tim for the circumstances of my life when I was the one choosing to live and talk and act the way I did? Short answer: I couldn't. It wasn't on Tim. It was on me.

I Was Her

The more he spoke, the more I realized something. I was *her*. I was the friend who wrote me an angry letter when I was seventeen. I was full of bitterness and resentment, vomiting out words that weren't pretty, definitely didn't speak life into anyone, and came from years of built-up junk that I had let take over my heart.

I. Was. Her. The exact person I vowed I would never be. All the deep hurt flooded back from when she wrote me that letter. For the first time, I truly saw from the outside that same deep hurt I was causing (and had already caused) Tim over the last several years. No excuses, no self-pity. Just eyes open to the yuckiness and sin that had taken over my heart and were hurting the one I loved most. He was my favorite person, yet I treated him as much less than that. Maybe not all the time, but enough that I had been slowly destroying the gift God had given me in marriage. I had slowly been turning my back on "to love and to cherish."

My tongue had become a weapon. I was an unfortunate expert at waging (and winning) wars with my words. I had never come to a place where I wanted to do anything about it badly enough. But this conversation with my dad brought me to a point in my life where I knew better and wanted to do better. To

a point where I desperately needed Jesus to take control of my heart and help me use my words in a way that was honoring to God, honoring to my spouse, and honoring to others.

As we move from this launching point into the pages to come, my words and stories will show how Jesus (along with other practical steps and encouragement) guided me on this journey to climb out of my pit and into new beginnings. The best part is, if He can do it for me, Jesus can do the same for you. For anyone.

* *Say It Well*

Oh, how our words matter. Words have incredible power: the power to give life and the power to tear it down. My hope is that you can start this book wherever you are (even if it's a bit messy) and let that be the first step toward learning to make the most of your words in an effective and life-giving way. Whether your struggle with words stems from past hurts, habits, or carelessness, we all have room to grow. I pray these next chapters, if needed, can give you the kind of healthy kick-in-the-pants encouragement my dad gave me. The kind that opens your heart to God's work—not only for your own benefit but for the benefit of those you love and those you encounter. Just remember: you're not alone, *and* you're not stuck!

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For anyone.

