

I SWEAR . . .

By R. Val Johnson
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The look on my mother's face broke my heart. Shock. Dismay. Disappointment. All filled her eyes one after the other and then merged into one emotion—betrayal.

Despite her teaching me all my 15 years to honor Heavenly Father in word and deed, there I stood, guilty of letting a particularly offensive word slip past my lips.

I hadn't meant to swear. Before that year, I had never used foul language. But that summer I had worked for Utah's Fish and Game Department and picked up the habit from other boys working alongside me.

Our main job was cutting burdock off the side of state roads. We quickly decided that *Arctium minus* is a particularly evil weed. It grows in volumes just about anywhere, and it crowds out most other plants. Its burs stick to anything that comes near.

Shovels in hand, we battled that nemesis all summer to the point of exhaustion—and dirty language. At first I found my comrades' language offensive. Then I tolerated it. Finally, I adopted it. By the end of the summer, swearing was sticking to my words as securely as burdock burs to dog hair.

My mother's reaction to my slip of tongue, however, convinced me that I needed to change.



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It wasn't easy. Swearing is not just a choice of words. It is also a pattern of thinking. The conversations we allow into our lives, the words we read, and the images we view shape our thoughts. I soon learned that I needed to change what I invited into my mind if I wanted to change the words I used.

Thankfully, I was active in attending church and seminary. Swearing had crowded out higher thoughts, but being in an environment where I was exposed to those higher thoughts allowed them to take root again. I concentrated on reading the scriptures every day and praying. I stayed away from movies and television programs that reintroduced dark thoughts.

Gradually, I found my language improving. By the end of the year, I was free of my swearing habit.

Since that experience, I've learned a lot about the power of words. Words can create or destroy. They can hurt, or they can heal. They can cut people down, or they can plant seeds of hope and love.

I find it interesting that the Savior Himself, the Creator of heaven and earth, is referred to as the Word (see John 1:1–4; D&C 93:6–11).

I've learned that swearing has a positive meaning as well as a negative one. We swear to tell the truth in a court of law. We solemnly promise, or swear, to keep God's commandments when we're baptized. Similarly, we make sacred promises to keep our temple covenants in order to receive the greatest of Heavenly Father's blessings.

The bottom line is this: We become more like the Word when our words honor Him and reflect His glory. ■