



WOW: Word Of the Week

Aphonia

June 4, 2025

Welcome. My sixtieth year of ministry and missions, teaching and preaching will soon begin. I have been working on a series of articles to summarize my work in missions over the past 30+ years. I have written about passion, finding what matters, finding your voice, losing your voice. I anticipate several one-word reminders for future WOWs. Today's WOW: aphonia.

Aphonia—the medical term for losing your voice. Aphonia is the complete loss of voice. This week you get two for one. A related word, dysphonia, refers to changes in vocal quality—hoarseness, breathiness, straining.

Aphonia hinders effective, enthusiastic living. The abundant life escapes us because of aphonia. Simply put? We are not talking--about spiritual things, about the things that matter most. That happens when Christians fail to develop their spiritual voices, when Christians never learn how to describe their own faith and faith journey. That happens when Christians fail to talk!

I share a story that has been around a long time—I first heard it at the Austin sermon seminar in the early 1990s.

A local newspaper ran a story about a woman and her parakeet, "Chippie." The woman was vacuuming Chippie's cage with a canister vacuum cleaner — with a metal hose and tube and various attachments. She was cleaning the cage without any attachments when the phone rang. She turned to pick up the phone, when she heard the horrible sound of Chippie being sucked into the vacuum cleaner. She put down the phone, ripped open the vacuum bag, and found Chippie stunned but alive. Chippie was covered with soot and dust so she grabbed him, ran into the bathroom, turned on the faucet, and held Chippie under the water to clean him off. She saw the hairdryer on the counter, turned it on and held the bird in front of the blast of hot air to dry him.

Before printing the story, the paper sent a reporter to interview the woman. The reporter asked, "How's Chippie doing now?" She replied, "Chippie doesn't sing much any more. He just sits and stares."

You caught the application, right? The church too often is not singing or talking, just sitting and staring. The early chapters of the book of Acts give helpful orientation and perspective. Acts 1:8, you will be my witnesses (giving testimony). Acts 2—listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth... The gospel was preached and the church began with speaking. Acts 4—Peter and John were seized and taken before the Jewish leaders because they were proclaiming Jesus. They commanded them not to speak or teach, but Peter and John says they could not help but speak (4:20). They rejoiced to be worthy of speaking and they spoke the word boldly, testifying to the resurrection of Jesus. Acts 5—the apostles are persecuted for speaking the message of new life in Jesus. Again before the council, the apostles respond that they must obey God rather than men. The chapter ends with the apostles speaking every day, proclaiming continually the good news. Acts 6—the apostles were committed to their ministry in the word. Acts 7—Stephen's speech got him killed. The gospel spread through speaking.

The idea has been popularized that the gospel can be preached without words—a misquote of Francis of Assisi. (There is no record of him having said that.) The gospel has always gone forth because of the vital, vibrant, valid voice of the church proclaiming good news. The last book of the New Testament finds Christians martyred. Martyr, witness, and testimony all come from the same root idea in Greek. Christians were martyred for their message, their testimony.

Returning briefly to the early chapters of Acts, one more truth catches my attention. When people were filled with the Holy Spirit, the result was always that they spoke the word. Check it out! Holy Spirit filling and zipped lips are a contradiction.

Aphonia. What happens when the church loses its voice? Look around us. The problem may be widespread, but the solution is personal. You and I can resolve as Christ-followers to find our voice.