

My Talking Back Journal: Responding to Unwelcome Voices

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by Evan B. Howard

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. . . . The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” But he answered, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”
(Matthew 4:1,3-4)

Sometimes we are assailed by unwelcome voices. Voices from our past. Voices from our culture. Voices of our dysfunctional habits. Voices from the devil. Jesus responded to the subtle lies that tempted him away from true life by talking back—and talking back with Scripture. We can find in this practice of Jesus Christ, as many others have found through Christian history, a model for our own life.

Fourth-century spiritual writer Evagrius of Pontus developed a handbook for just such occasions. He states, “Now the words that are required for speaking against our enemies cannot be found quickly in the hour of conflict, because they are scattered throughout the Scriptures and so are difficult to find. We have, therefore, carefully selected words from the Holy Scriptures, so that we may equip ourselves with them.” There is no doubt but that Evagrius’ selection emerged from his own personal struggles and his ministry of hearing others’ struggles.



Why not try your own Talking Back journal?

The practice of talking back requires four simple steps:

1) Identify an unwelcome voice –

There are some unpleasant voices that need to be explored, understood, and even welcomed. There are others that should be refuted as obstacles to the knowledge and love of God. The point at this stage is to notice and recognize them as such. Sometimes you will be able to distinguish a clear source of the voice. Sometimes you will only be able to identify *that* this voice—when it arises—is unwelcome.

2) Name the lie –

It is one thing to recognize the voice of the evil one. It is another to discern the lie that is being promoted through this voice. Here you must look at what arises in the mind to see what this voice is trying to accomplish.

3) Find the biblical response –

Once you’ve recognized and named the lie, then you search the Scriptures for an appropriate response. Some scripture passages serve to strengthen motivation. Some speak directly against particular lies. Others draw us to God. See if you can find the right Scripture that will best serve God’s work in you whenever you face this particular unwelcome voice again. Then write it down in your journal. Better yet, write it and then memorize it. Now you are ready to fight.

4) Talk back

Next time that voice assails you, reach for your new sword. Recognize the unwelcome voice. Consciously name that

lie. Turn to your biblical response and proclaim it with all the courage you've got.

*Jesus said to him, "Away with you Satan! Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him."
(Matthew 4:10-11)*