

WEEK EIGHT

Death and life are in the power of the tongue.

PROVERBS 18:21a NKJV

The words we speak are a spiritual gauge, showing how much of our soul we have surrendered to God. If we have allowed our minds to be renewed by the Word, our conversation can't help but reflect what we have learned. If, on the other hand, we are hesitant to release our old habits and beliefs, our words will betray us and reveal our true spiritual condition. If our souls are not in submission to God and we haven't surrendered everything to Him, our tongues will be the first to sell us out.

Write Luke 6:45.

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Read Matthew 12:34-35. What does Jesus say about the relationship between our hearts and what we say?

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Ask Yourself: What does my day-to-day conversation say about my spiritual condition? Do my words reflect that God lives inside of me?

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Jesus tells us that a life consumed with the cares and treasures of the world will lead to fruitless talk that will bring judgment upon us. A life surrendered to God and filled with the Holy Spirit will produce speech full of grace, mercy, love, and power.

THE POWER OF GOD'S WORDS

By faith we understand that the entire universe was formed at God's command, that what we now see did not come from anything that can be seen.

HEBREWS 11:3

With words, God spoke the entire universe into being. With words, He communicates to us. Through the Bible, with its thousands of words, He reveals Himself to us. John 1:1 says that Jesus is actually the living, breathing Word of God. Words and language were His idea, and His words are literally life to us. Because God created man in His image, our words have power. Since Jesus is our example in everything, and we are to follow in His steps, let's look at a few verses that demonstrate the power of His words. In the following verses, underline what happened when Jesus spoke.

Matthew 8:26 – Jesus responded, “Why are you afraid? You have so little faith!” Then He got up and rebuked the wind and waves, and suddenly there was a great calm.

Matthew 8:32 – “All right, go!” Jesus commanded them. So the demons came out of the men...

John 11:43–44a (ESV) – When He said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.” The man who had died came out.

As you can see in these verses, the spoken Word of God can bring healing, peace, deliverance, and life!

TWO KINGDOMS

Isaiah 14 recounts the fall of satan. Verses 12–14 say, “How you are fallen from heaven, O shining star, son of the morning! You have been thrown down to the earth, you who destroyed the nations of the world. For you said to yourself, ‘I will ascend to heaven and set my throne above God’s stars. I will preside on the mountain of the gods far away in the north. I will climb to the highest heavens and be like the Most High.’” Through the power of satan’s spoken words of rebellion, the kingdom of darkness was established. And he actually spoke the first words of rebellion in his heart. Satan and his demons continue to speak words of rebellion to our minds. If we aren’t enlightened to this truth, we will be his advocate in hurting others and even ourselves with the words that we speak. Every time we open our mouths to talk, we either advance the kingdom of life or we advance the kingdom of death.

When we were saved, we weren’t taken directly to heaven because we are Jesus’ body—His hands, feet, heart, and mouth designed to reach the lost and make a difference in this world. But we can’t advance the Kingdom of Heaven on our own.

Knowing we would need help in order to represent Jesus to the world, God set us up for tremendous success by sending us the Holy Spirit. Jesus told His disciples it would actually be to their advantage if He left and went back to heaven (John 16:7). Though Jesus was fully God, He was also fully human—He could only be in one place at a time while He walked around in a human body. We can be filled with the Holy Spirit and have Him as our personal guide through life no matter where we are on the earth. Jesus said, “But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on

His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come” (John 16:13 NASB). In other words, through the Holy Spirit, God will disclose to us all the guidance we will need, including what to say.

Ask Yourself: Am I intentional to use my words to promote the Kingdom of God and to minister to others?

Control Issues

In the Garden of Eden, satan spoke to Eve to entice her. Eve didn't know it, but when she and Adam had a conversation about satan's idea, she advanced the kingdom of death through her spoken words. God said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat from it'; cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you will eat of it all the days of your life" (Genesis 3:17 NASB). Satan didn't bring death to Eve by biting her and releasing poisonous venom or by wrapping his coils around her and squeezing the life out of her. He talked her to death. She then proceeded to talk Adam to death by discussing the evil idea. Can you see how important it is to control our words?

Controlling what we say requires us to tame the part of ourselves that contains the power of life and death: our tongues.

We all make many mistakes. For if we could control our tongues, we would be perfect and could also control ourselves in every other way.

JAMES 3:2

Some of our greatest hurts and heartaches come from what people have said to us. Conversely, some of our greatest memories center on positive things that people have said to us, like the phrase, "I love you." Those are wonderful words to hear, but for some of us, they are hard to say, even to those we love. Our words can either tear others down or build them up.

Think of all the conversations you have in a given day. Are the words that come out of your mouth reflective of what you say you believe in your heart? As Christians, our words and actions should reflect our love for God. If they don't, it's important to look inward and see where our hearts and our words are not matching up. Jesus' brother James makes the argument that if you say you are a Christian and that you love God, but your attitude and actions reflect something different, you may fall into the category of the deceived. In James 3:2, he says that we can control ourselves in every way if we can control our tongues.

Read the statements below and consider the effect these words of life or words of death can have on someone's life.

Words of death

- I hate you.
- I wish you had never been born.
- You're ugly.
- You'll never amount to anything.
- You're stupid.
- You're selfish.
- You shouldn't even try.
- You're a failure.
- I never want to see you again.
- I want a divorce.
- You were a mistake.
- I don't understand "you people."

Words of life

- I love you.
- You're such a blessing!
- You look great.
- I see potential in you.
- You're smart.
- You're so thoughtful.
- You can do it!
- You did your best.
- I forgive you.
- I'm committed to you.
- Life is better because of you.
- I would like to hear about your experience.

DEHUMANIZING LANGUAGE

One way our words can cause significant damage to others is when we categorize people by labels. How we individually do this varies based on our backgrounds and experiences, but all of us have pre-formed opinions about people who are different from us, whether that difference involves race, gender, socioeconomic status, or a number of other factors. We tend to see those who are different from us as something “other” than ourselves, and we put “them” in a box that comes with a lot of assumptions. That box is dangerous because it causes us to overlook the other person’s humanity. “They” become easy to dismiss because that’s “just how they are.” It’s much easier to dismiss a label than it is to dismiss a real person with real pain and real experiences.

We have to fight this tendency to assign people a label and make assumptions about them because no matter how different we seem to be, we are all made in the image of the same God. As our Creator, God approaches all of us with the heart of a Father, and He cares deeply about how we see and speak to each other. All parents care about how people talk about their kids! We should talk about others the way we want people to talk about our own children. If we love God, we will love who He loves, and He loves every person He has created. We should always strive to see people as individual human beings and image-bearers who are worthy of our respect and the benefit of the doubt. When we speak with words that honor others, we honor God.

TONGUE-TIED

The book of James goes on to talk about the power of the tongue, our spoken words. In chapter three, James tells us that the tongue can defile the whole body, and he uses three vivid images to help us see his point:

1. **A Bit:** The tongue is petite, weighing only about two ounces, but it is powerful. Like the small piece of metal used to steer horses, the tongue can control the direction of our lives (James 3:3).
2. **A Rudder:** Although ships are typically large and driven by strong engines, they are steered by a very small blade. Too often we focus on the big things and forget that this one little issue of the tongue could determine the direction of our lives. The tongue can control us, or we can use it to control our destiny (James 3:4).
3. **A Spark:** A spark, though caused by a quick strike, can set off a wild fire. In the same way, what we say might be curt but can be consuming. Some of the most hurtful things that we have said or that have been said to us are sharp one-liners or even one word. These abrupt, rude statements may be quickly forgotten by the one who said them, but the impact stays with the person who receives them (James 3:5).

Thousands of acres of forest can be destroyed by a fire that hundreds of firefighters cannot extinguish. Similarly, the tongue can cause destruction beyond belief. While at times words can be petty and seemingly insignificant, they can be poisonous. Careless words often cause great harm. Imagine a child struggling to read and a frustrated and worried parent

listening to the child twist the words day after day. Finally, after losing all patience, the parent screams, "What's wrong with you? You can't read!" Those words have the potential to make the child feel stupid and give up even trying. Thoughtless words can have a lasting effect that could change the course of a person's life.

Write James 3:7-8.

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Sometimes it praises our Lord and Father, and sometimes it curses those who have been made in the image of God. And so blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth. Surely, my brothers and sisters, this is not right! Does a spring of water bubble out with both fresh water and bitter water? Does a fig tree produce olives, or a grapevine produce figs? No, and you can't draw fresh water from a salty spring.

JAMES 3:9-12

Ask yourself: Do I say things about myself, or others, that I quickly regret?

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HOW TO TAME THE TONGUE

We need God's help to change the way we speak, but know this: Change is possible. Because we were made in God's image, we were meant to speak words of life that build up, bring healing, and offer encouragement. Let's take a look at a few principles that will help us use words that advance the Kingdom of Life.

1. Guard your heart.

Jesus says in Matthew 12:34, "Whatever is in your heart determines what you say." The words of our mouth reflect our inner condition. If we desire to control our tongue, we need to control the junk that bombards our ears and saturates our souls. Remember, "A good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart, and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart" (Matthew 12:35). It's the old "garbage in, garbage out" principle.

Write Psalm 51:10.

Some of us grew up in homes where everyone was critical, where belittling remarks were part of the daily routine and yelling was the main form of communication. If you were raised in that kind of environment,

you may have already made a decision to do things differently. But maybe you still experience great discouragement after you lash out at someone, wishing you had not acted that way. Because you saw verbal attacks modeled when you were young, you react the same way. This is a vicious cycle that may lead to something called generational sin. Generational sin is passed down from person to person in a family until it is recognized and broken. One of the ways to break the cycle is to put a filter on our minds and protect ourselves from the venomous effects of careless and evil speech.

2. Gauge your tongue.

A gauge is a tool used to measure or determine the maximum amount of something. If we had a gauge on our tongues, we would know when to stop speaking. Colossians 3:8 (NIV) says, "But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips." We must decide that we aren't going to say the things we used to say. We need to make the decision today and then manage our decision daily.

Write Psalm 141:3.

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Read Proverbs 10:19. What happens when we talk too much?

What do sensible people do?

3. Garnish your speech.

A garnish is an extra flourish set on a plate to add a pleasing aesthetic to the dish. What would it be like if we decided that before we let anything out of our mouths, we would garnish it to make it sound pleasing to others?

Write Ephesians 4:29.

At times, we need to say things that are difficult or may appear negative, but even so, we can speak in a way that can bless and encourage the other person. Even bad news can be delivered in a life-giving way. Discipline can be given in a way that truly benefits the one being corrected.

Sometimes, the best thing to say is nothing at all. There were plenty of times that Jesus held His tongue, even when He endured absolute brutality. In fact, although He never committed a sin, the Bible says that Jesus learned obedience by the things He suffered. "When being reviled and insulted, He did not revile or insult in return" (1 Peter 2:23a AMP).

WISE WORDS

The Proverbs are full of teaching regarding how we should use our tongues.

Read the following Scriptures and write the instruction given.

PROVERBS 4:24

PROVERBS 15:1

PROVERBS 16:13

PROVERBS 16:28

BREAKING THE CURSE

Sometimes, entire families are characterized by certain words. "They're just a bunch of losers. None of them even finished school." "They've always been that way—they say even her grandmother had a bad temper." Sin can be passed from generation to generation, and so can the consequences (Exodus 20:5). If your family has generational sin in any form, the good news is that you can be freed from it! You can be the first generation to walk in freedom and begin a flow of God's loving kindness and blessing to a thousand generations after you (Exodus 20:6). Ask God to shine light on words that should never have been spoken to you. Also, ask Him to help you identify any language your family might use that has been detrimental to the way you interact with each other or others.

Write down any words of death and cursing that your family uses regularly in conversation.

Write down any words of death and cursing that you have spoken to yourself.

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Write down any words of death and cursing that you have spoken to others.

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The Voice of Victory

If you have been on the receiving end of destructive words, there is good news: You can truly be healed and set free from the effects of those words. Below are four steps you can take to be set free from harmful words that have been spoken over you. Pray through these steps as you begin to identify any lies you have believed.

1. **Confess:** Healing starts with admitting we were wrong. We must first acknowledge that we have believed something that is not true and have agreed with the lies of the enemy.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

1 JOHN 1:9 NIV

2. **Repent:** To repent means to change direction. When we repent, we choose to turn around and go the opposite way of our previous path. Stop your agreement with the enemy in its tracks and set your mind on a new course of thinking. If anyone has hurt you by reinforcing these lies in your life, forgive them and release them to the Lord.

Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.

ACTS 3:19 NIV

It is important to note that when we confess our sins and reject the enemy's lies, we realign ourselves with God's truth. Armed with confidence in His Word, we can take authority over the enemy and remove the effects of his lies from our lives.

3. **Cast off:** We must refuse to allow the enemy to continue to use destructive words or events against us. With the authority of the Name of Jesus, command the enemy to leave.

Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

JAMES 4:7 NIV

4. **Bless:** Once the enemy has been removed, fill the place that he held with truth and promises found in Scripture. Speak life over yourself by declaring an accurate view of how God sees you.

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

EPHESIANS 2:10 NIV

LIFE DECLARATIONS

Read these words aloud, and receive the truth from God's Word:

- I am blessed with confidence that God made me in His image and that He has given me a great purpose.
- I am blessed with God's supernatural wisdom, and I have clear direction for my life.
- I am blessed with creativity, courage, ability, and abundance.
- I am blessed with a strong will, self-control, and self-discipline.
- I am blessed with great family, good friends, and good health.
- I am blessed with faith, favor, and fulfillment.
- I am blessed with success, supernatural strength, promotion, and divine protection.
- I am blessed with an obedient heart and with a positive outlook on life.
- I declare that any curse that has ever been spoken over me, any negative evil word that has ever come against me, is broken right now in Jesus' name.
- I am blessed wherever I go.
- Everything I put my hands to is going to prosper and succeed.
- I am blessed!

