

Watch Your Mouth

A Devotional by Sharon Stults

We don't need to wonder if getting our mouths in order is a priority with God. Over 126 verses about the tongue and mouth, make it clear that God wants his children to get their mouths under the control of Holy Spirit and out of the hands of our old natures.

We create an atmosphere around ourselves with our words. This not only affects the quality of our lives but the life of everyone we interact with during a day. Are we building up or tearing down? Are we encouraging or discouraging? Are we bringing hope or doubt?

My hope is that these stories and meditations will stick with us and become part of our inner governor to help regulate what we put out into the world around us. Our modern culture is desperately in need of wise, gracious, truth-speaking believers to overcome the tsunami of ugly words that sweeps across our lives every day. Let's be part of a movement that cleans up the messes and sorrows the ugly-word storms leave behind. Let's speak life and hope into desperate situations and change our world one conversation at a time.

Day One- Limited Words

“Too much talk leads to sin. Be sensible and keep your mouth shut,” Proverbs 10:19.

President Calvin Coolidge was famously known as a man of few words. His nickname was “Silent Cal.” His wife, Grace Goodhue Coolidge, told the story of a young woman who sat next to her husband at a dinner party. She told Coolidge she had a bet with a friend that she could get at least three words of conversation from him. Without looking at her he quietly retorted, “You lose.” Coolidge understood very well the value of using only carefully considered words—and those being few.

Story Source: *The Presidents of the United States of America*, Frank Freidel and Hugh S. Sidey

Satan will tempt us to talk out of turn in many types of situations.

When we are sick or tired.

When we are hurt or angry.

When we are falsely accused or a victim of gossip.

Simultaneously, and with much more authority and power, the Holy Spirit is at work in us to produce his fruit in our characters. Self-control is one we especially need where the tongue is involved. Choices become habits and habits form character. Each time we choose to hold our tongues instead of letting them run wild, we are building internal character muscles. We are giving Holy Spirit some space and some quiet to speak to us and help us formulate a Christ-like response to a challenging moment. Sometimes that response will simply be now words at all in the same way that Jesus did not always answer his critics. In time, it will become our habit to respond to people and situations with wisdom and grace instead of reacting and running our mouths.

Prayer

Lord, forgive me for falling into Satan’s trap of running my mouth when I’m under duress. Holy Spirit, grow your fruit in me. Teach my tongue to speak lovingly, joyfully, peacefully, patiently, using good words, with kindness, meekness, gentleness, and self-control. Let people who know me best see an authentic and observable change in me.

Day Two- Critical Words

“A perverse person stirs up conflict, and a gossip separates close friends,” Proverbs 16:28.

At a tea for officers and their wives, the commanding general of a base delivered a seemingly endless oration. A young lieutenant grumbled to the woman sitting beside him, “What a pompous and unbearable old windbag that slob is!”

The woman turned to him, her face red with rage. “Excuse me, Lieutenant. Do you have any idea who I am?”

“No ma’am,” the man fumbled.

“I am the wife of the man you just called an unbearable old windbag.”

“Oh,” said the lieutenant. “And do you have any idea who I am?”

“No,” said the general’s wife.

“Good” said the lieutenant, getting up from his seat and disappearing into the crowd.

Source: Unknown

Criticizing is easy. We can pick apart another person with minimal brain effort. The object of our critique may indeed be doing something sinful, stupid, obnoxious, or inept. These are the moments when God and Satan offer us some interesting choices. Satan of course wants us to jump into a mosh pit of gossip and criticism.

God offers us several choices. If we have authority or influence in someone’s life, then truthful, gracious critiques are necessary for the building up of the body of Christ. If we are not in relationship with that person, our observations of their behavior should become prayer points. If it matters enough that we want to gossip and criticize, shouldn’t it matter enough to pray for them?

Prayer

Thank you, Lord, for setting a perfect example for us in all ways. You demonstrated how to point out sin and wrong choices in someone’s life at a right time, in a right way, with right motives on many occasions. Show me where I am missing your mark in this area. When you prompt me to share a critique, help me to do it in a way that builds up, not tears down.

Day Three- Trashy Words

“Obscene stories, foolish talk, and coarse jokes—these are not for you. Instead, let there be thankfulness to God,” Ephesians 5:4.

A young man named John received a parrot as a gift. The parrot had a bad attitude and an even worse vocabulary. Every word out of the bird’s mouth was rude, obnoxious, and laced with profanity.

John tried and tried to change the bird’s attitude by consistently saying only polite words, playing soft music and anything else he could think of to “clean up” the bird’s vocabulary. Finally, John was fed up and he yelled at the parrot. The parrot yelled back. John shook the parrot and the parrot got angrier and even ruder.

John, in desperation, threw up his hands, grabbed the bird and put him in the freezer. For a few minutes the parrot squawked and kicked and screamed. Then suddenly there was total quiet. Not a peep was heard for over a minute. Fearing that he’d hurt the parrot, John quickly opened the door to the freezer.

The parrot calmly stepped out onto John’s outstretched arms and said “I believe I may have offended you with my rude language and actions. I’m sincerely remorseful for my inappropriate transgressions and I fully intend to do everything I can to correct my rude and unforgivable behavior.”

John was stunned at the change in the bird’s attitude. As he was about to ask the parrot what had made such a dramatic change in his behavior, the bird continued, “May I ask what the turkey did?” Source: Unknown

Trash talk is so acceptable in our culture now, many of us don’t recognize it when it comes out of our mouths. We think it’s normal, even funny. I’m not proud of the wake of garbage words I’ve left behind me in my lifetime. Many of us need a Holy Ghost revival on our tongues. Let’s do ourselves and those around us a favor and repent now and not force God to take us to the woodshed on this. Let’s renounce talk that’s crude and rude and let Jesus’ blood wash us.

Prayer

God, forgive me for coarse jokes and crude talk. For pointing out people’s mistakes and flaws in ugly ways. For foolish conversations about things that should be kept private. Forgive me for talking around the edges of obscenity while taking pride in not using the “really bad” words. Sanctify my tongue and purify my heart. Create in me a clean heart O God and renew a right spirit in me.

Day Four- Encouraging Words

“Timely advice is lovely, like golden apples in a silver basket,” Proverbs 25:11.

A group of frogs were travelling through the woods, and two fell into a deep pit. All the other frogs gathered around the pit. When they saw how deep the pit was, they told the two frogs that they were as good as dead. The two frogs ignored the comments and tried to jump up out of the pit with all their might.

Finally, one of the frogs heeded what the others were saying and gave up. He fell and died. The other frog continued to jump as hard as he could. Once again, the crowd of frogs yelled at him to stop the pain and just die. He jumped even harder and made it out. When he got out, the other frogs said, “Did you not hear us?” The frog explained to them that he was deaf. He thought they were encouraging him the entire time. Source: Unknown

Everyone experiences struggles and challenges but sometimes, the pit becomes so deep, we want to let go and allow it to close over us. If not for encouraging, faith-filled words of others, many of us would have died in a pit long ago. The will to live is a powerful force God placed inside every human which Satan tries to overcome with trials and hardships. He wants us dead and will speak all manner of discouragement and despair to us in many forms. Solomon wasn't kidding or being poetic when he said that life and death are in the tongue.

Who can I help to climb higher, jump farther today or to simply keep holding on if that's all they can do? We often are unaware that people around us are emotionally dangling by their fingernails. Our words of affirmation, appreciation, faith, empathy, kindness, and love can be the difference between someone hanging on for another day or letting go.

Prayer

Father, open my eyes to the desperation and despair around me at work, in the marketplace, in my neighborhood, my family and my church. Put words in my mouth that are like gold apples for those who need them so much. Help me to slow down and take time with people, to notice them and encourage them. Let me become more generous with affirmation and appreciation.

Day Five–Careless Words

“I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned,” Matthew 12:36-37.

Once upon a time an old man spread rumors that his neighbor was a thief. As a result, the young man was arrested. Days later the young man was proved innocent. After having been released he sued the old man for wrongly accusing him. In court the old man told the Judge, “They were just comments and didn’t harm anyone.”

The judge, before passing sentence on the case, told the old man, “Write all the things you said about him on a piece of paper. Cut them up and on the way home throw the pieces of paper out. Tomorrow, come back to hear the sentence.” The next day, the judge told the old man, “Before receiving the sentence, you will have to go out and gather all the pieces of paper that you threw out yesterday.

The old man said, “I can’t do that! The wind spread them, and I won’t know where to find them.”

The judge then replied, “In the same way, simple comments can destroy the honor of a man to such an extent that no one can fix it. If you can’t speak well of someone, choose to say nothing.”

Source: “Inspiring Stories” Website

Our mothers were right about this you know. If you can’t say anything nice... How often are we casually careless with our words? Once they exit our mouths, we can’t get them back. They are in the environment affecting it positively or negatively.

God hears it all. Some of the word bombs we dropped on people decades ago are still recorded in his accounts. We’ve never asked forgiveness for them because we were also careless in our understanding of how close of a watch God keeps on us. It’s not too late to confess this as a sinful pattern in our lives or to repent for specific instances that God brings to our minds.

It’s possible that our prayers are hindered, and blessings withheld because of these unpaid word bills. Praise God that Jesus’ sacrifice is sufficient to pay off our accounts and return us into right standing with God, but we must do our part by confessing and repenting. Some of us have entire personas wrapped up in patterns of flippant, careless words because we’ve gotten positive feedback. Some people laugh and tell us we’re clever while others carry hit and run silent wounds that we’ve inflicted. It’s time to stop.

Prayer

God, please bring to my mind any careless words for which I need to repent. Show me if I need to go speak to someone and make things right with them. I confess that I may have a pattern of carelessness with my words. Cleanse me and change me, Lord. Use me to build others up.

