

The Tool in Everyone's Mouth

**LIFE FAITH FUSION
DEVOTIONAL
DAY TWO**

SCRIPTURE STUDY

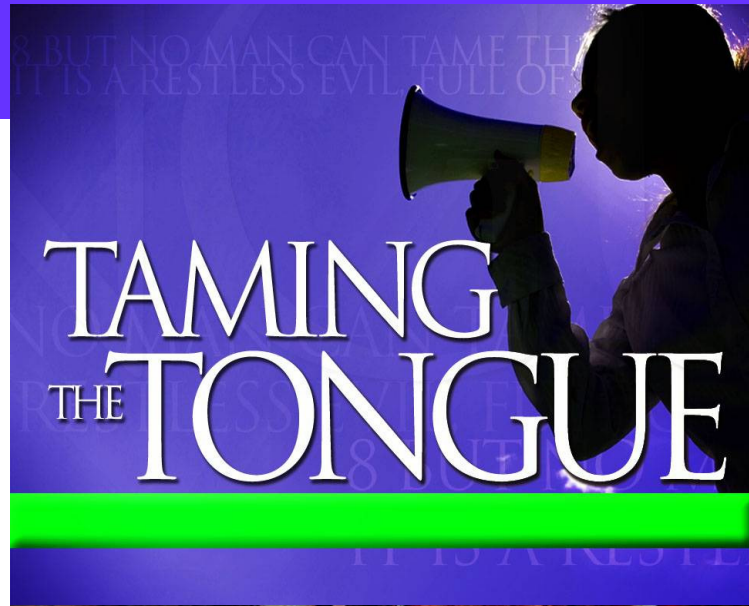
Proverbs 21:23
Proverbs 18:4,21
Proverbs 12:18, 25
Proverbs 18:4
Proverbs 15:28
Proverbs 28:7
Proverbs 26:7-9
Matthew 12:34b
Psalm 119:103

DIGGING DEEPER

According to Strong's Concordance, the figurative meaning of the Hebrew word for tongue can mean speech, an ingot, a fork of flame, a cove of water. James used the flame nuance for his picture of the power of the tongue in James 3:10-11.

PRAYER FOCUS

Dear Jesus,
Help my words to please You and to bring healing and edification to others. Give me a pure heart so that my speech is an honest reflection of who I am.
Amen



DISCERNING WORDS

Proverbs, God's "how-to" book of the Bible, is His gift of wisdom for our daily lives, so that we may develop discernment, discipline and discretion. Whether sparing us from calamity or helping us to lead more wholesome lives, the Lord recognizes that our wisdom or lack of it is often first revealed through our words. In Proverbs 21:23, King Solomon makes a promise:

"He who guards his mouth and his tongue keeps himself from calamity." (NIV)

In our world, we may be criticized for being slow to speak. A lawyer may be articulate in defending a client, but may be bending the truth to win the case. The used car salesman uses superlatives to describe the vehicle he wants you to buy, but those words may or may not be true. The sycophant employee may be effusive in his praise of his boss to get what he wants, but God is unimpressed. Solomon reminds us that words should be carefully chosen. The quick answer is not always the best answer. The truth may be hard to tell, but God-blessed when uttered. Which is better: to respond slowly and have less to regret later or to allow a torrent of words to make a false impression? Solomon pens these words in Proverbs 18:4:

"The words of a man's mouth are deep waters, but the fountain of wisdom is a bubbling brook." (NIV)

“The heart of the righteous weighs its answers, but the mouth of the wicked gushes evil.” Proverbs 5:28 (NIV)

A Christian editor once said: “I spend all day taking a writer’s words and making sure that anyone reading them would understand what they are trying to say. Even the simplest sentence can be taken seven ways. That’s why e-mail can be so dangerous. It’s great for imparting information or casual social exchange, but is terrible for conversing about important or sensitive information that would usually require a conversation. Sociologists tell us that e-mail is 300% more likely to cause misunderstanding. Why? Because without tone, non-verbal cues, gesturing, modulation and vocal emphasis, we do not get the full impact of words.

For example, one instance the editor encountered was a writer’s sentence describing the response of the Ninevites to the preaching of Jonah. The writer penned these words: “Sometimes, God wants us to panic.” She explained “Here are the possible nuances of this word-crafting that could be misconstrued. “God wants” chips away at God’s sovereignty. If He is God, He can speak it into being. *Wants* implies a lack of power. “Wanting us to panic” implies God delights in our discomfort. God manipulates us by pushing us close to the edge. God is angry at us so He puts us in terrible situations. God is laughing when we freak out. “Panic”-does it mean a melt-down or a heart attack, or simply being anxious enough to get busy? The carefully crafted new sentence read like this: “Sometimes, God allows us to be in stressful situations to bring us to the point of being open to listen to Him.” Trying to communicate with the right words is a challenge at best.

King Solomon demonstrated such discretion when he was asked to judge a thorny issue between two prostitutes in 1 Kings 3:16-28. Two mothers bore their children in the same house. As they slept, one mother rolled over on her infant and suffocated it. Then she stole the live baby while the second mother was sleeping, and placed her dead child by the other mother. When morning came, the two women fought bitterly over the baby. The king was asked to mediate the conflict and determine the child’s rightful mother. This is the most detailed example of the king’s wise words in the Bible. The monarch commanded one of his soldiers to cut the baby in half and give each woman half the child. Of course, the real mother gave the child to the imposter to save the life of her baby. Because of her response, Solomon wisely determined the identity of the real mother. All of Israel marveled at his wise judgment.

The Hebrew king also clearly taught that we should listen rather than speak when we approach God. Job, the man afflicted with boils, the loss of his family and all of his worldly possessions, argued with God for forty-one chapters. But when God appeared to Job in Job chapter forty-two, Job was speechless. Solomon affirmed this truth in Ecclesiastes 5 when he taught us to listen more and say less in the presence of a Holy God:

“Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong. Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few. Ecclesiastes 5:1-3 (NIV)

- Do people with the most to say always have the most to contribute? Why or why not?

- Recall a time when you needed to have a better grip on your tongue. How could more discretion have improved the situation?

- What are some ways we can learn to listen to God? (journaling, prayer, etc.) Which ways do you most often use?

WORDS OF LIFE

In Proverbs 18:21, Solomon teaches “The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.” Why would Solomon make the claim that the tongue, the tiny slippery appendage, has the power of life and death? We need to be mindful that the first nine chapters of Proverbs is an extended discourse on wisdom. “Wisdom” is described as a person who seeks to protect us and prepare us for life’s struggles. Jesus, John, and James agree with Solomon—get wisdom. Reach out to her and you won’t be sorry. Hold onto her for dear life because she is the key to happiness, success, and even eternal life.

John the apostle used a similar anthropomorphism in John 1:

“In the beginning was the Word (Logos). The Word was with God and the Word WAS GOD.” (NIV)

The WORD of God spoke worlds into being. James, the brother of Jesus expounded on this truth in his letter:

“The tongue is also a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is ITSELF set on fire by hell.” James 3:6 ff.

The tongue not only can speak worlds into being, it can set in motion the very agenda of the Devil. We can relate to the power of the tongue by standing in the defendant’s shoes in a courtroom. The jury hands a piece of paper to the judge. One or two words can steer the course of your future. Guilty or not guilty. That’s the difference between freedom and the death penalty.

Solomon and Jesus both agreed that we are accountable to God for our words. Because words have spiritual power, they not only set into motion the destructive forces of hell; conversely, they can unleash the mighty power of God to bring life. For example, the word “comfort” in Hebrew means “to breathe into, to resuscitate.” When we comfort someone, we can revive their broken spirit. Life-giving words can bless others more than we can comprehend. The power of words was affirmed by Jesus in John 6:63 when He proclaimed:

“The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The **words** I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.” (NIV)

- What are some powerful words that were spoken over you by influential people in your life? What did they say? Did they give you strength in a difficult trial? Did they clarify your calling in life? Write those words on the back of this sheet.
- Remember a time when you spoke destructive words. Ask the Holy Spirit to remind you of that time and take the opportunity to ask for forgiveness, and to speak words of encouragement.
- Ask God to bring to mind someone in your life who is hurting. What are some words of comfort that you can speak to them? Take time to speak to them, phone them, e-mail them, or write them a note this week.

APPLYING THE SCRIPTURES

Read the verses below. Summarize them in your own words. What do you learn about the tongue? Write your answers on the back of this sheet.

Proverbs 21:23, Proverbs 18:4,21, Proverbs 12:18, 25, Proverbs 18:4, Proverbs 15:28, Proverbs 28:7, Proverbs 26:7-9