

Why I Need Spiritual Speech Therapy (and You Might Too)

Two of our little grandkids are in speech therapy. Honestly sometimes I feel like I need speech therapy too! What about you? Does your tongue ever get you in trouble? I know—mine too!

The wise writer of Proverbs wrote, “Death and life are in the power of the tongue” (Prov. 18:21a). The apostle Paul wrote, “Let no unwholesome word proceed out of your mouth” (Eph. 4:29a). The word “unwholesome” means decayed, rotten and speaking of death. In other words, Scripture implores us to choose words of faith that give life.

Unwholesome words can fall into the category of negativity, profanity or words that tear others down. Jesus Himself said, “But I say to you that for every idle word that men speak, they will give an account on the Day of Judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matt. 12:36-47). We will be held accountable for how we use our tongues. Scary thought!

How do we use our tongues to bring life to others rather than despair? How do we use our tongues in such a way that we won’t be embarrassed at the end of our life because of the words we’ve spoken? How do we set boundaries around this tiny but powerful instrument of our body?

Proverbs 18 gives us a few tips on how to set boundaries around our words:

Don’t delight in airing your own opinions.

“A fool has no delight in understanding, but in expressing his own heart” (Prov. 18:2).

We are in love with our own opinions. If you doubt that statement, just scroll through social media. There are plenty of opinions on everything!

Opinions aren't wrong. They help define who we are. But if you're airing your opinions without respectfully listening to the opinions of others, you are being foolish. It's just not necessary to share your view on everything. Some thoughts are better left unsaid, particularly when you are trying to build a relationship. You don't have to sacrifice your views. You can own your own opinions; you just don't have to share them all. When we feel the need to state our view on every little matter, it's often because we feel insecure and we're trying to persuade another to agree with us. But we can have relationships without agreeing on everything.

Don't gossip.

"The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to the inmost parts" (Prov. 18:8 NIV).

Here's a good rule of thumb: in your conversations, don't cast another person in a bad light, and don't share confidential information. Paint others in a positive light. If you have concerns, pray and process with God. At times there's a need to process with a wise friend or counselor, but don't share beyond that. Scripture is so clear on gossip—it's wrong. So stop.

Don't answer without listening first.

"To answer before listening—that is folly and shame" (Prov. 18:13).

Ouch! Convicting, right? Allow the other person to completely finish their thoughts before you answer, give an opinion, or say anything at all. In other words, be quick to listen and slow to speak (James 1:19). Who around you needs to feel heard? Slow down and listen.

Putting boundaries around your speech will pay off, but how do you speak in way that edifies and encourages others? Compliment often. Encourage frequently. Affirm regularly. And pray continually. Remind yourself every day that your tongue has the potential to bring life to others. I'm convinced that we are living in a world where people are dying for encouragement. So don't miss the opportunity to build them up!

Why don't you take a moment and pray this prayer with me: *Lord Jesus, so often I mess up with my mouth. Holy Spirit, fill me. Let the words of my mouth be pleasing to You and uplifting to others. Set a guard over my mouth, Lord. Help me not to speak any unwholesome word or any word that discourages. Instead, fill my mouth with words of praise and joy.* {eoa}

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