

# LOVE YOUR TONGUE

Proverbs 18:20-21

How many of us have had our mouths washed out with soap?

It's a wonderful metaphor. Soap cleans, so what do you need when dirty words come out of your mouth? You clean your mouth with soap!

It's a wonderful metaphor, but terrible experience. Mom used *Lava* soap from the utility sink. She didn't dab it; she scraped the bar against the back of our uppers and lowers! We were blowin' bubbles for hours.

Mind you, my sisters and I were not given to profanity. It's not like we went around the house swearing like sailors. But my parents insisted our speech be very respectful. Words and phrases that got us a mouth washing included "shut up", "stupid", "butt". If I called my sisters "fat", I might as well go get the *Lava* for my mom because I was getting my mouth washed out.

Some of you might be turned off by mouth washing; we kids hated it. But it was effective. It trained us to be thoughtful about what we said. It made for a peaceful and safe home. I never once heard my parents speak in an unbecoming way to each other. My parents never once spoke to me or my sisters in a demeaning manner. My parents never yelled. Never.

Ours was a peaceful, safe and loving home.

But ours was the exception and not the rule.

Hurt people hurt people with their mouths. The human tongue is a huge problem. When considering Bible teachers for the Church, James insisted each candidates' speech be seriously evaluated.

## **JAMES 3:1-12 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. <sup>2</sup> For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body. <sup>3</sup> If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. <sup>4</sup> Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. <sup>5</sup> So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things.

How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! <sup>6</sup> And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. <sup>7</sup> For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, <sup>8</sup> but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. <sup>9</sup> With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. <sup>10</sup> From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. <sup>11</sup> Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? <sup>12</sup> Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.

Your tongue reflects your character.

If your words are mean and hurtful it's because you are mean and hurtful. If your words are critical and condescending it's because you are critical and condescending. If your words are thoughtful and caring it's because you are thoughtful and caring. That's part of the good news of the Gospel; your character will if you obey the truth of God's Word. If you will obey, the Holy Spirit will transform your character into the likeness of Jesus. Your speech will be transformed as well.

Your tongue can become a life-giving spring.

Proverbs has a lot to say about your mouth. It does so using terms like *tongue*, *lips*, *mouth*, *speech*, *words*. If you take to heart what Proverbs teaches about your tongue, your speech will improve and become a blessing.

We all seem to go through an annoying phase in our teenage years when we have an answer for everything. We encouraged our children to consider the wisdom of Proverbs 17:28:

**<sup>28</sup> Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise;  
when he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent.**

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, young people talked on the phone. We limited our children's time on the phone guided by the truth of Proverbs 10:19:

**When words are many, transgression is not lacking,  
but whoever restrains his lips is prudent.**

Open ended phone conversations eventually devolve into gossip, flirting, crass joking and the like. Seldom do they lead to a Bible study or to a workable plan to stop global warming.

On a more serious note I want us to consider the profound truth conveyed in Proverbs 18:20-21:

**20 From the fruit of a man's mouth his stomach is satisfied;  
he is satisfied by the yield of his lips.**

**21 Death and life are in the power of the tongue,  
and those who love it will eat its fruits.**

Your tongue is incredibly powerful.

Your tongue puts food on the table. That's the meaning of verse 20. Whatever you do for a living requires communication spoken or written.

Your tongue is incredibly powerful.

Your tongue has the power to nurture life or render death. This is true in both the physical and spiritual realms. One day you might have to tell the hospital staff to take your child, your wife or your husband off life support.

**21 Death and life are in the power of the tongue,**

One day you'll have to take that last trip to the vet and say goodbye to your beloved dog or cat.

**21 Death and life are in the power of the tongue,**

Cathy and I discussed and agreed that, Lord willing, we would start our family in my final year of seminary. By God's grace we welcomed baby Ashley into our family in March, 1989.

**21 Death and life are in the power of the tongue,**

At times, your tongue will have power over physical death and life.

But every day you speak words of life or words of death to those around you. Your tongue has the power to nurture life or kill it in the hearts of others.

Constant criticism kills. Sarcasm kills. Refusing to talk kills.

**21 Death and life are in the power of the tongue,**

Conversations in which we take a genuine interest in the other person's story, beliefs and feelings infuses life. Asking open ended questions is one of the critical

keys to life-giving conversations. Another key is active listening; really listening to the other person's answer, not using the time to formulate your next statement. These conversations should be taking place in your home between you and your spouse and between you and your children. You can live under the same roof and not really know your spouse or children.

Compassionate conversation is the way to bring the life-giving truth of Jesus to those not yet saved. Few people have anybody in their lives who are really interested in them. When we take a genuine interest, it is life-infusing and in some cases opens the door to be able to share the way of salvation.

We all desperately need encouragement because most of us struggle with insecurities and are our own worst critics. "I love you.", "I'm so proud of you", "Great job!", "Thank you!", "I really appreciate you.", are all life-infusing words that should be the main stock of your speech.

Finally, "I'm sorry," and "Will you forgive me," are life-giving phrases because they convey that the relationship is more important than my pride.

Whole books are written on the topic of the tongue because it is so powerful. I hope you come away from this sermon with a renewed sense of the power you possess; the power of your words. That's what it means in verse twenty-one when it says:

**and those who love it will eat its fruits**

To love your tongue means you are fully aware of its power and you value your ability to impact others with your words. Implicit in loving your tongue is the commitment to use it to infuse life in others.