

Journey CHURCH

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The Wreckage of Words

How can you tell when your talk is not what it ought to be? One identifying factor is its effect on other people. Does what you say pull people down or build them up? Do the words from your mouth inspire or destroy? After people spend time with you, do they walk away with a smile on their face and pep in their step, or do they walk away with their head hung down, their energy drained, and the light lost from their eyes?

Many of us don't realize the negative effect our words have on other people. At work, whenever someone has an idea or shares a vision, some people respond with ten reasons why it could never work. Others always look tired, and their words reflect a spirit of apathy or criticism. Still others always seem to focus attention on them-selves regardless of the topic of conversation. In each case, a roomful of people can be adversely affected by one person's inappropriate words.

Words matter—they can give us enthusiasm or deplete it. They can give us hope or crush it. They can protect our reputations or destroy them.

Video Teaching Notes

As you watch the video, use the space below to take notes. Some key points and quotes are provided here as reminders.

Eloise's Story

Eloise and her nine brothers and sisters grew up as a pastors kids. They learned from their father how Christian community was supposed to function, but they congregation did nothing but judge and slander her family. After years of hearing people talk poorly about their father, many of Eloise's siblings decided never to go back to church. It hurts Eloise to know that the slander and gossip of other Christians had such a traumatic effect on her family and her faith. In her adulthood, Eloise had confronted several people from the church in order to forgive and move on without bitterness.

Teaching 1: Tony Evans

Spreading a message of gossip is like scattering feathers in the wind. Once it is sent, you can't get it back.

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Slander breaks fellowship with God.

We are told not to associate with those who slander.

Flattery is like chocolate-covered lie.

Flattery involves saying things that makes others feel good just so you can accomplish your own agenda.

Evil speech, evil in our communication, whether its gossip, or slander, or flattery, goes against God as a God of truth.

Quotables

- There can be evil in your esophagus and Satan in your speech.
- A sharp tongue is the only edged tool that grows keener with constant use (Washington Irving).

Travis Story

Travis worked in Chicago with inner-city kids, and some of the younger guys he worked with noticed the way he talked, the language he used, and the music he listened to. They asked him why he never said certain words, and he was able to share why and how his faith influenced his speech.

One time Travis challenged a kid named Orlando to a game of basketball. They agreed that if Travis won, Orlando would replace the rap music on his mp3 player with worship music. Travis did win—Orlando ended up really liking the new music! Gradually, it started to change what came out of his mouth.

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Teaching 2: Tony Evans

Hallow the Lords name. Do not use it casually, in jesting or in cursing.

We should be known for speech that is clean, not filthy.

We are able to bless those who curse us. Not because they deserve a blessing but because we do.

God wants us to use some spiritual mouthwash and get the dirt out of our discourse.

Video Group Discussion

Eloise

1. Eloise's father was a pastor for 50 years. At one point in the church's life, a severe division led to a tremendous amount of slander and gossip about her father. This caused a couple of her brothers to leave not only that church, but the church altogether. Why do you think these negative words had such an impact on Eloise's brothers?
2. What was Eloise's father's response? In what way did that model to her a right response to negative speech?

Travis

1. Travis told us how his example of friendship with urban youth provided opportunities to positively impact their speech. In what way did Travis refrain from judging those he was with? How did he model positive speech?

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2. One of the youth lost a basketball game, and as a result, he agreed to listen to gospel and worship music. What did Travis say this resulted in with regard to the youth's own speech over time?
3. Are you mindful of the music you listen to? Do you think it impacts your own speech at all?
4. Do you feel convicted to change any of the music or television programs you allow into your heart and mind? If so, in what way?

Put-downs

Tony shares the story of a constant battles between Winston Churchill and Lady Astor. They were in the British Parliament together, and Lady Astor said to Winston, "Sir, if you were my husband, id put arsenic in your tea." Churchill replied, "If you were my wife, id drink it."

1. Have you ever known someone who can always "one-up" a negative word? They are quick on their feet when it comes to putting someone else down. How do you respond in the company of someone who often puts you down?
2. Does it bother you to be around people who tend to out other people down? How does that make you feel? What does that reveal about their heart?

Many times, people with an insecure heart need to put other people down. When we come to realize that we are revealing weakness in our lives by insulting others, we may have more self-control in what we say.

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The Telephone Game

Tony compares gossip to the telephone game. He says words can get misconstrued when someone passes a message to another person, who passes on to the next person, and so on. By the time you get to the end of the line, the message is totally different from how it started, and the truth has become distorted.

Let's take a moment to play the telephone game. Have one person write a three-sentence statement. This person whispers the statement to the next person, and so on. (You can whisper it only once on your turn.) At the end of the line or circle, the last person repeats what is said, and that is compared to the written statement.

Typically the words and phrases get twisted and turned by the time they reach the last person. As you can imagine, life is no different. As a gossip spreads and the original source is out of the picture, the story can completely change into something that wasn't at the beginning.

Gossip is wrong at the beginning, and it becomes worse as it goes on because it becomes more and more distorted—often worse than you could have imagined.

Read Together Psalm 109:17-20 (NASB)

He also loved cursing, so it came to him;

And he did not delight in blessing, so it was far from him.

But he clothed himself with cursing as with his garment,

And it entered into [a]his body like water

And like oil into his bones.

Let it be to him as a garment with which he covers himself,

And for a belt with which he constantly girds himself.

Let this be the reward of my accusers from the Lord,

And of those who speak evil against my soul.

Look again at the first line. It said that cursing came to him. Tony said that when you curse (or speak badly of) another person, this will then come back to you. How does this impact you and your speech? What spiritual effect does your speech have on you?

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Group Bible Exploration

Read Together Proverbs 10:18; 20:19 (NASB)

He who conceals hatred has lying lips, And he who spreads slander is a fool.

He who goes about as a slanderer reveals secrets, Therefore do not associate with a gossip.

1. What does a slanderer do?.
2. Why is revealing secrets a wrong and hurtful thing to do?
3. This verse says not to even associate with a gossip. Is that a teaching you hear often from the pulpit or Christian books? Why do you think this isn't emphasized as much as other supposedly bigger sins?
4. Do you think God views some sins as bigger than others?
5. How should we feel about gossip and slander based on these verses?
6. How should this affect our own choice of words?

In an English country churchyard stands a drab, gray tombstone that bears an epitaph not easily seen unless you stoop over and look closely:

Beneath this stone, a lump of clay;
lies Arabella Young,
who, on the twenty-fourth of May,
began to hold her tongue.

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Read Together Psalms 15:1-3 (NASB)

O Lord, who may abide in Your tent?
Who may dwell on Your holy hill?
He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness,
And speaks truth in his heart.
He does not slander with his tongue,
Nor does evil to his neighbor,
Nor takes up a reproach against his friend.

1. Who does this verse tell us can abide near to God?
2. What does “He...speaks truth in his heart” mean? Are these words spoken or unspoken?
3. Do the words in our hearts matter to God, or just the ones that escape our lips?
4. Why is it difficult for us to hold our tongue?

Read Together Job 32:21-22 (NASB)

“Let me now be partial to no one,
Nor flatter any man.
“For I do not know how to flatter,
Else my Maker would soon take me away.

Flattery. This is also a subject we look at infrequently in discipleship and teaching. On the chart below, rate where you think our Christian culture is on viewing flattery as a sin---1 is a grievous sin, and 10 is no sin at all.

1-----10

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1. How is flattery used to manipulate?
2. Can you recall a time when someone was flattering to you until they got what they wanted—and their tone changed? How did you feel about this?
3. Why does flattery insult the character of God at such a deep level?
4. Read this excerpt from *Watch Your Mouth* and compare Judas's betrayal to flattery. Have you ever looked at Judas's kiss as a form of flattery? Does this affect the way you view this sin of flattery?

Flattery offers up sweet words, yet they come laced with the poison of manipulation. The purpose of flattery is always to gain favor. It is not a compliment given for the sake of expressing true appreciation. Rather, it is an intentional use of words to gain a position of advantage. Some people use flattery so often, they don't even notice they are doing it. They butter people up so they can use them for their own purposes. After all, most of us will respond to flattery. Who doesn't enjoy hearing compliments of how great we look, how well we do something, and the like?

Scripture has harsh words to say about the use of flattery. Jude writes about flattery in relation to false teachers when he says, "These are grumblers, finding fault, following after their own lust; they speak arrogantly, flattering people for the sake of gaining an advantage" (Jude 16 NASB). Psalm 12 tells us that flatterers will be judged in the strictest of ways: "May the Lord cut off all flattering lips, the tongue that speaks great things" (Psalms 12:3 NASB). The Bible is letting us know that flattery is so damaging, manipulating, deceptive, and wrong that God would rather see the tongue removed altogether than allow it to continue.

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Flattery is an insincere compliment designed to deceive the intended hearer or hearers in order to gain control over them. Flattery looks like a friend in the same way a wolf looks like a dog. It may appear fluffy and cute, but it will rip you to shreds if you get close enough. It is Judas approaching Jesus with a kiss, a sign of affection, at the very moment of humanity's greatest betrayal.

Watch Your Mouth, pages 151-152

5. Are you aware of using flattery in your work, at home, or with friends? Will you ask God to make you aware if you are not? Take a moment to pray right now and ask for Him to make this clear to you.

Read Together 1 John 1:5-10 (NASB)

This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.

God is a God of truth and commands us to be people of truth.

Jesus was the only preacher who didn't seem to mind making His congregations smaller with His sermons. He would have big crowds following Him, and then He would come up with a line like "No one can come to Me unless it is granted to him by the Father" (John 6:65).

1. What happens in verse 66?
2. Why do you think that happened?

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Jesus never let the crowd control the truth. He never flattered others, nor did He seek flattery. Likewise, out of His mouth came no manipulation, deception, or false witness. That's the same mouth that got dead man up and out of a grave simply by saying his name. Do you want your lips to have the power to move mountains in your life and restore life to dead situations? Then let your lips be like Christ's in every way.

Read Together Ephesians 4:29 (NASB)

Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.

1. What does this verse say is not proceed from our mouth?
2. List examples of everyday, common, unwholesome words.
3. What is to come out of our mouth instead?
4. List examples of words of edification.
5. How can our words give grace to those who hear them?

In Closing

So many of the people who feel free to praise God on Sunday feel just as free to laugh at filth the rest of the week. Free speech has become more important than clean speech.

Watch Your Mouth, page 156

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As you can end this session, consider how often you listen to gossip, slander, and filthy speech. Think about the news or television programs you watch and the video clips you see online. Would the things entering your ears honor God and please Him? Let this be a measurement for what you choose to watch and listen to.

As we conclude our study, complete the “On Your Own in the Coming Days” section below.

Own Your Own in the Coming Days

Verses to Remember

As we saw with Travis in the video and the effect worship music had on the speech of one of the young men he mentored, countering negativity with positivity or lies with truth is a great approach. To counter any wrong in our mouths this week, commit to memory the following verses, all taken from the Psalms.

- O Lord, who may abide in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy hill?
He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness, and speaks truth in his heart.
He does not slander with his tongue, Nor does evil to his neighbor,
Nor takes up a reproach against his friend; (15:1-3)
- You have tried my heart; You have visited me by night;
You have tested me and You find nothing; I have purposed that my mouth will not
transgress. (17:3))
- Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight,
O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer. (19:14))
- I said, “I will guard my ways that I may not sin with my tongue; I will guard my mouth
as with a muzzle while the wicked are in my presence.” (39:1)
- Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, Whom He has redeemed from the hand of the
adversary (107:2)
- With my lips I have told of all the ordinances of Your mouth. (119:13)
- Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O Lord, You know it all. (139:4)
- Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; Keep watch over the door of my lips. (141:3)

Self-Analysis

Let’s do a self-analysis on our speech. On the chart below, where 100 reflects complete self-control and holiness in speech and 0 reflect the other extreme, grade yourself with regard to

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the different areas we discussed in this lesson and in previous lessons. This will give you a visual on where you need to improve.

This may be even more helpful if you ask a close friend or relative to grade you as well. Then compare notes and set your mind on improving.

Encouraging and building up others

0-----50-----100

Speaking with wisdom

0-----50-----100

Praising God

0-----50-----100

Thanksgiving

0-----50-----100

Gossip

0-----50-----100

Pulling others down or “cursing” others

0-----50-----100

Flattery

0-----50-----100

Filthy or rude speech

0-----50-----100

The Intentional Tongue

Pick a day this week to notice when you are saying or hearing anything negative. Choose to encounter and negativity with five positive statements. This may feel awkward, but just try it for a day. It will heighten your awareness to negativity in you and around you. Be sure to include watching the news or listening to the radio.

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Opening Your Mouth

What can you do to intentionally use your mouth to model to others what you have learned during the course of this study? Be careful not to beat anyone over the head, but follow the examples that Travis and Eloise's father provide---simply model a right heart that flows out of your mouth as a reflection of Christ in you.

Think about it, pray about it, and do it. Make it a lifestyle.

A Meditation

What have you been complaining about lately? What have you been using your mouth for that is contrary to the Lord's will for your life?

Take some serious time to mull this over, to pray, to feel, to confess, and to correct. Let to Holy Spirit speak to you and show you how Satan is using your own mouth against you. Then seek God and His strength to turn that around for good.