

The Christian Woman and

## Speech

**Key Verse:** But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison (*James 3:8*).

An old preacher friend told the story of a woman in his church, who for years had used her tongue to spread gossip, back bite, and harm others. One day, she got under old-fashioned conviction and came to the preacher to confess her sins. The old preacher listened as she shared years of verbal sin, and when she was done and wanted to lay that sin on the altar, he said to her, "Sister, we only have 50 feet of altar, but do the best you can."

That story is a reminder that a healthy examination of our lives and motives is in order from time to time. We all need the Holy Spirit to remind us the tongue can be either a lethal weapon or an instrument of love. It is our choice.

The average tongue is less than three inches long and very firmly attached to the hyoid bone in the base of the mouth. However, it has been known to take vacation from the safety and security of the mouth and wander out to do permanent damage to the people unfortunate enough to be in close proximity.

The tongue's ammunition is words. As surely as a sharpened sword can pierce a heart, words can damage and leave wounded forever the heart they strike.

Read Psalm 34:13 and write it in your own words.



What do you think God wants us to conclude from this verse?

The Bible says no man can tame the tongue (James 3:8). Yet a heart ruled by the Holy Spirit can bridle the tongue and use it to speak life, not death.

Answer truthfully:

1. Is your tongue a weapon or a soothing balm for those who hear your words?

2. We should think before we speak. What other ways can we try to harness our tongue?

3. Do you really have a desire to curb the tongue, or do you enjoy gossip?

As we study the tongue, may God reveal to us our hearts. May He shed light on the things we cling to (Psalm 139:23).

## **The Disguise**

Sometimes we disguise underlying motives with statements like, "I was just telling you their problem so we can pray about it"; "Don't tell a soul about this but..." We are not called to be instigators; we are called to be peacemakers.

No one but God knows our true hearts. Only by our actions can those around us see our hearts. If we always seem to be looking for "a good fight," what does that say to the world about our salvation, about our Savior?

We are showing the world who we are. An old expression says, “Actions speak louder than words.” People will remember *what* you do more than what you *say*. When words bring harm, they speak louder than your actions.

### Exploration and Interaction

If anyone had a good tongue-lashing coming it was Peter when Jesus met him on the shore that day (John 21:15-17). How did Jesus handle Peter? He only spoke love. What a great example to follow!

Recall a time when you could have received wrath from God but only received love.

### Reflection

Read 1 Peter 3:8-12. *Refrain* in verse ten literally means to cause to cease. Do you need to cease from using your tongue for evil-speaking and deceitfulness?

### People of Angst

“For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work” (James 3:16).

You probably know at least one person who really knows how to “push your buttons.” Jesus encountered some of these self-righteous folks in His travels, and I am amazed at how He kept His cool when He dealt with them. They constantly sought to find a chink in His armor. Yet He was able to diffuse any situation with just a few words and silence His accusers.

It would be great to possess the wisdom to quiet a boaster or settle down a loudmouth without becoming one yourself. When we encounter such people we must find another outlet to handle them.

Living closer to God brings peace and contentment the world cannot offer; a place of refuge when our heart is hurting, a way to keep our tongue in control when we wish to let it go (James 4:8).

## Exploration and Interaction

Did a particular person pop into your head when you read the first line of this section? What about them sets you off?

If you look closer into their life, what are they covering with their attitudes, sadness, inadequacies, and feelings of hopelessness?

Prepare words for the next time you encounter them, a statement that will allow you to get out of the conversation without anger.

Why does that person get to you so easily?

Is jealousy or envy involved?

## Reflection

Harshly spoken words find their way into hearts that may already be hurting and do damage that may never be healed.

## Tongues of Fire, Mayhem, and Confusion

"Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!" (James 3:5).

"Hey, did you hear about...?" How many conversations have you been privy to that started this way? Can you see the gossiper lean in close to kindle a fire ... just a few words thrown on the fire to build the

heat, spread the flames? Does the spark in her eyes reflect the one in your own?

How do you receive a juicy bit of gossip? Are you eager to hear and already have in mind the next person to tell? The tongue is a fearless member, caring not what mayhem and confusion it wreaks.

When I was in high school, a boy committed suicide after a classmate began a vicious rumor about him. He was driven to an act that forever ended any hope of a happy outcome or a better future.

Words, rumors, and a vicious, lying tongue changed this lonely boy into someone so depressed and hopeless that he took his own life. The other classmate started the process, but everyone who added a piece of kindling by spreading the story fed the flames that destroyed his soul (James 3:6).

### Exploration and Interaction

Read James 3:5-8. The smallest member of our body can do irrevocable damage. The Word cautions us to guard our tongues. Has an incident in your life allowed you to see an evil tongue in action?

What was your part in it?

How has God dealt with you about this issue?

How have you responded?

## Reflection

Commit James 3:5b to memory and let it be a reminder of the pain we can inflict on others. Read James 3:9-18 and write your understanding of these verses.

The Bible teaches that blessing and cursing should not come from the same mouth. We have a choice which of these we reflect with our speech.

Try the following experiment and journal the results:

1. Speak softly and gently to the first person you interact with after this lesson. Chart their reaction.
2. Speak loudly but respectfully to the next person you talk with and gauge their reaction.
3. Speak as softly as possible to your family for one full evening. Do not raise your voice or lose your temper; speak love. What was their reaction?
4. Sing softly as you prepare dinner and make sure your children hear you.

Write a brief conclusion in your journal about this experiment.

It is hard to bicker with someone speaking gently and lovingly to you (Proverbs 15:1). If a person rubs you the wrong way, speak softly and gently to them.

On the way to the mall, my family and I were involved in a fender-bender. The other driver was angry and yelling at my husband with offensive language. My husband Charlie remained calm and the other man's anger began to fade. By the time the police arrived, he had decided the damage could be buffed out.

Charlie gained the man's brother had inoperable brain cancer, and he was on his way to the airport to go visit him. My daughter and I watched as Charlie prayed with him and promised to continue to pray for his brother and his family. I used this experience to teach my daughter the value of speaking soft words, and how God was leading her dad to say the right things. That man was not there by accident (2 Timothy 3:16).

**About the Writer:** Beverly Brantley and her husband Charlie serve in their local church, First FWB of Tampa, Florida. They (officially retired) now spend their time parenting the light of their life, six-year-old Desi.