

Set a watch, O Lord,
before my mouth;
keep the door of
my lips.



The Door of My Lips

Read: Lamentations 3, Hebrews 10:23, Romans 8:31-39

Deuteronomy 7:9 declares “he is God, the faithful God.” In the Old Testament, God’s faithfulness was demonstrated in His covenantal relationship with His people. Faithfulness is not only a characteristic of God, but it also indicates a relationship. Being faithful requires someone to be faithful to.

In this study, we’ll be looking at faithfulness with the tongue. Who are you faithful to with your words?

Read: Galatians 5:22-23, John 15:4-8, Matthew 6:33, Exodus 34:14

“It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us: If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.” (2 Timothy 2:11-13)

Being faithful can be hard. It’s okay! We are in a constant battle with human, sinful nature. Our human nature causes our faithfulness to sway with our circumstances and feelings. That’s why this line from 2 Timothy is like a breath of fresh air every time I read it: “If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful.” In the ESV, “if we are faithless, he remains faithful.” Even when I’m not faithful, He is! Faithfulness is part of God’s character, and here it is demonstrated as part of Jesus’ character.

Let’s look at the familiar fruits of the Spirit. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance...” (Galatians 5:22-23) The ESV and NIV translate longsuffering as faithfulness—an aspect of the character of God the Father, Jesus the Son, and a fruit of the Holy Spirit.

To read the fruits of the Spirit as a list of characteristics to attain is futile. If we focus our efforts on simply trying to do all of these things, we will fail. Instead, these fruits are produced by a relation-

ship. Reread John 15:4-8. We can't do it on our own anyway! As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself...neither can you. Another breath of fresh air! We cannot simply produce the fruits of the Spirit, including faithfulness, without being part of Christ.

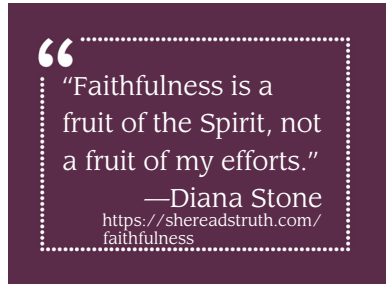
When we talk about faithfulness in this study, it is not a task to check off or a rule to follow. It's the cornerstone of a devoted relationship. Being faithful isn't about maintaining a perfect list of do's and don'ts, but it is about simply abiding in Him.

Unlike us, He is unchanging.

When our faithfulness seems to lessen with changing circumstances, we can rest in His enduring faithfulness.

Have you ever felt your faithfulness shift, perhaps in the wake of a circumstance that left you feeling abandoned or caught off guard? Was your faith eventually restored?

What other devotions compete for your heart's affections? Does anything sometimes seem to beat God out for the top spot? Why? Be honest with yourself and pray about it



Read: Colossians 4:6

I love grits. Buttery, smooth, with a little bite from salt. If you've ever (hopefully mistakenly) eaten grits without salt, you know that grits can easily transform from a golden breakfast staple to a bland pile of mush.

Salt is important. It seasons food by enhancing the best characteristics of the dish, by bringing out the best notes of flavor. Likewise, Paul notes in Colossians 4:6 that words should be seasoned. Grits don't come salted—salt must be added. Seasoning your words means speaking with intention.

Speaking with grace, or seasoning your words with grace, is a way to build faithfulness in your relationship with Christ, even while engaging with the world around you. Grace is a filter for the words you say and a lens for interpreting the words you hear.

The Message paraphrase of Colossians 4:6 offers some practical application: “Make the most of every opportunity. Be gracious in your speech. The goal is to bring out the best in others in a conversation, not put them down, not cut them out.”

1. **Make the most of every opportunity.** We're well acquainted with James' lessons on the tongue. We know the tongue is a rudder and a spark—words are powerful. Every time you speak, you exercise power in the words you choose to use. Ephesians 4:15-16 tells us that speaking truth in love “makes the body grow” (ESV). Words of truth lead to growth. Let your words be an opportunity to grow in faithfulness by speaking with kindness and truth.
2. **Be gracious in your speech.** Graciousness takes practice. Sometimes our words seem to escape before we can catch them. The best way to train your speech to be gracious is to train your mind to be gracious. When we abide in the Holy Spirit and learn to see others as Christ sees them, grace towards others will grow.

By the way, grace and kindness don't have to be synonymous with bland and boring. Being gracious with your speech doesn't have to mean replacing all personality with insincere niceties. God made us with humor, personality, and charisma—and for some of us, that means sarcasm and ironic wit. The key here is spirit. Are your humorous words mean-spirited and inconsiderate? Let's look at the next one.

3. The goal is to bring out the best in others in a conversation, not put them down, not cut them out.

“Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Ephesians 4:31-32).

Slow down and think about what you are saying before you say it. To bring out the best in others, you first must listen to what the other is saying. Speaking with grace is about listening as much as it is speaking. Whether in witty banter, everyday conversation, or difficult conversations, put away “evil speech” and be kind.

Although I hope these points offer some practical ways to think about grace-filled words, try not to lose focus on the heart of it all: faithfulness. Faithfulness is bigger than a list of rules. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself...neither can you. Just like the fruits of the Spirit do not manifest without abiding in Christ, neither can your speech be full of grace. Learning to speak with grace-filled words is part of tending a growing relationship—it’s part of our living and dynamic relationship with Christ.

Words of truth lead to growth. Have you seen growth in an area of your life as a result of your words? Are there any stagnant areas of your life that could use more words of honesty and kindness?

Have you ever found yourself surprised by the words coming out of your own mouth? What are some areas where you could practice speaking with more intention?

Read: Ephesians 4

“Lead me, O Lord, in thy righteousness because of mine enemies; make thy way straight before my face. For there is no faithfulness in their mouth; their inward part is very wickedness; their throat is an open sepulchre; they flatter with their tongue.” (Psalm 5:8-9)

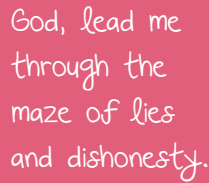
Although its users number in the billions, Facebook is no longer just a website. It’s almost completely integrated into our communities and shapes the ways we inhabit our world.

For me, and many others, Facebook is actually part of my job. Some companies and brands forgo their own website in favor of a well-maintained Facebook page. Rather than an account users log off and onto, Facebook is a parallel plane of our lives.

This parallel plane, although often called virtual reality, contains all of the same traps and pitfalls that we face in offline life. Unfortunately, we’re not always as guarded on Facebook or other places online as we are in the physical world. Sometimes, when we enter scrolling mode, we forget to stop and process what we are seeing.

That graphic your friend

shared (“Did you know? The average cup of tea has 5x more caffeine than a cup of coffee!”) simply isn’t true just because it looks believable. Be wary of sharing posts or “facts” without checking for credible sources. Although some lies are silly, others are more insidious.



God, lead me
through the
maze of lies
and dishonesty.

Just like any gathering of people in a physical space, Facebook is rampant with fabrications and falsehoods, as well as downright maliciousness. This is not a Facebook problem, it’s a people problem.

Have you ever encountered a comment thread that seemed to spiral into a pit of meanness, misunderstanding, and even hatred? It seems like people will type and share thoughts on social media comments they would never say out loud. Just as our spoken words are a reflection of our heart’s condition, so are our actions online

Reread Ephesians 4:31-32. This applies on social media, too! Every social media interaction is an opportunity to use

grace-filled words, build one another up, and be faithful.

I traveled to New York recently for work. On Instagram, I posted a photo from the High Line, a park built on a former elevated train line. To the uninformed, it might have appeared that I spent the weekend crunching fall leaves in New York parks. In reality, I spent two 13-hour days working in the basement of a convention center. On the last day of the conference I was working, I escaped with a colleague for a quick break. That was it! I spent 20 whole minutes at the High Line. That anecdote isn't an exercise in how to get away with lying on social media, but rather, a reminder that no single post on a social media platform is meant to share the entire breadth of an experience.

The family vacation photo your friend posts might not tell the whole story of the year they spent scraping and saving to afford a trip to the beach. Please don't mistake me. Sharing a happy family photo isn't a bad thing, and no one is required


to post personal details. People have varying levels of comfort with what they choose to share publicly, both online and in person. Whether your Facebook friends share a lot or only a little, social media is just the highlight reel. It isn't designed to represent the whole truth.

From the information we absorb to the photos we share, let's be faithful on social media. Let's remember that posts aren't meant to carry the full weight of every experience. Let's post with joy and honesty, but also with balance and sensitivity. Let's read and respond to comments with thoughtfulness and grace—or simply not respond at all. Let's not fall prey to the lies and false information that circulates the Internet by using common sense when we read and share information. Let's be faithful offline by not letting “Instagram-perfect” photos interrupt truly beautiful moments with our present families and friends. Let's be faithful both offline and online.

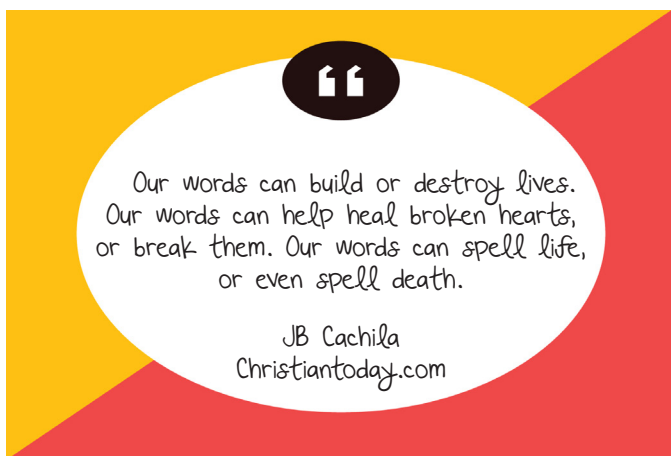
Have you ever found yourself believing something, whether good or bad, you read on Facebook without stopping to make sure it was true?

How do you represent yourself on social media? How are you faithful with the words and images you post?


Faithfulness to the truth is a two-way street. Are you faithful in what you post? Are you faithful in what you take in?

At the end of the day, faithfulness is bigger than our daily conversations. It's bigger than what we read or post on social media. But these day-to-day moments can be helpful in revealing and diagnosing our inner condition. Remember: As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself...neither can you. 

About the Writer: A Florida native, Emily Faison currently lives in Tulsa, Oklahoma, where she is an editor at Brief Media. She is also the associate editor for IMages, published by IM, Inc.



WHEN REBELLION IS OBEDIENCE continued

As Christians we must be bold yet discerning when we share our faith. We must emulate Paul's passion in Ephesians 6. He begged Christians in Ephesus to pray for him that he would be given the words to speak boldly as he opened his mouth to proclaim the gospel as he ought to speak. Like Paul, we are ambassadors of this gospel. We must be bold, even when it could cost us everything. 

About the Writer: Amanda York and her husband Tim are part of North America Missions church plant in Buffalo, New York. She is the mom to Bryson (7) and Haddon (6). Amanda works as a free-lance American Sign Language interpreter that specializes in medical interpreting.