

The Tongue

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Basics

We are a generation that talks too much. We feel we must speak and are entitled to “let our voice be heard” as a famous musician says.

We won’t sit down and be silent. Silence appears too uncomfortable. We feel compelled to speak, to tweet, to post, to comment, to FaceTime to record a voice note.

If we can’t speak to others - we speak to our devices: *Alexa, Siri or Cortana*.

Meanwhile our children blabber whatever comes into their minds, nonsense or not and we don’t stop them. What happened to the old adage: “*children should be seen not heard*”?

One of my daughters, Faith told me recently that she feels it’s her gift to speak non-stop. I had to gently remind her that the bible takes the opposite view. It is the one who remains silent who has the gift:

“A truly wise person uses few words; a person with understanding is even-tempered. Even fools are thought wise when they keep silent; with their mouths shut, they seem intelligent.” Proverbs 17:27-28 NLT

Have you ever wondered why spies as depicted in popular media don’t speak much? You can give your whole life away and even the secrets of your heart with just one word. Jesus said it this way:

“... those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Other examples from the bible

It is pretty clear that the reason the bible asks us to speak little is obvious:

First - there is no sin lacking when one speaks too much (exaggeration, gossip, slander, lies, blasphemies against God, declaring lustful intentions).

In fact Jesus (in the passage in Matthew 15 quoted above) is going even further: He is saying that:

1. physical sins (e.g adultery and murder) actually start in the heart;
2. then they are “activated” by the tongue; and
3. finally result in the physical action.

We do what our hearts think and then what our mouths tell us. See how speaking out is powerful?



It even appears words such as during “self-talk” (or soliloquy) contribute according to science up to 90% of your success in life (positive outlook being driven by positive self-talk) ^{iv} and even the “positive confession movement”^v in some Christian circles uses this biblical concept to an extent.

Because words are powerful, the more we can control our tongue, that radar for our entire body, the more we can control the entire course of our lives - sending us to heaven or hell. It is that serious!^{vi}

Second - We seem to underestimate how powerful words are.

- **By word - God spoke the universe into being.** Calling things that were from things that were not. ^{vii}
- **By word the prophets of old, those men of faith:** called dry bones to come alive, shut up the heavens from raining for 3 years, caused great cities to repent and caused their lineage to be that of the messiah.
- **By word we can give life or take life.** The tongue, the bible says, has power over life and death (Prov 18: 21).
- **By word we can bring judgement upon ourselves.** God takes your word so serious that you might have an intent in your heart but it's when you say something that he judges you. Here is what he says about words and promises to him:

“Do not be rash with your mouth, And let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God is in heaven, and you on earth; Therefore let your words be few.”^{viii}

How our generation should do it...

Internet trolls, liars

We are a generation of internet trolls who think we are doing things for fun by making up stories about others and hiding behind internet screens when we speak lies and harmful comments but the bible says it's the equivalent of stabbing someone with a physical knife or worse, an axe.

“Telling lies about others is as harmful as hitting them with an axe, wounding them with a sword, or shooting them with a sharp arrow.”^{ix}

Careless words to loved ones

Have you ever said something mean or cruel (perhaps to someone you love) and after words they say, they felt it was like a knife piercing through their heart?

The above verse shows that indeed the tongue does pierce through the heart. The bible takes such a serious perspective to self-control [including of your tongue] that lack of control means you are left as defenceless:

“A person without self-control is like a city with broken-down walls.”^x

Because the tongue has power over life and death and the bible takes the view that speaking less is more, how then should we exercise self-control over our tongue in our generation today?

If you must speak:

1. Take your time to answer - hear like a 100m dash sprinter but answer like a 10,000 mile marathon runner! The bible in James 1: 19 says:

“So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath;”^{xi}

2. Answer with grace - not a toxic motor mouth

“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.”^{xii}

3. Give up the filthy jokes, sexual innuendos, the S & F** bombs in your speech.**

“Do not let unwholesome [foul, profane, worthless, vulgar] words ever come out of your mouth, but only such speech as is good for building up others, according to the need and the occasion, so that it will be a blessing to those who hear [you speak].”^{xiii}

4. Make it a worthwhile conversation – the speech of your life!

People have made great speeches which changed hearts, minds, actions, history^{xiv}:

Our Lord Jesus set out his “Manifesto” for his mission on earth with his sermon on the mountain. “Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven”. This same speech introduced the Lord’s Prayer to the world.

Churchill assured the Nazis that the British wouldn’t give up fighting for freedom during World War II. They would fight everywhere: *“we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our Island, whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender.”*

Ghandi in his non-violence independence struggle advocated for all men being equal:

“It is to join a struggle for such democracy that I invite you today. Once you realize this, you will forget the differences between the Hindus and Muslims, and think of yourselves as Indians only, engaged in the common struggle for independence.”

Kennedy beautifully brought a nation round to the decision to explore outer space and go to the moon: *“We choose to go to the moon. We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win, and the others, too.”*

Lincoln at Gettysburg coined the definition of what democracy was: *“that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”*

Luther turned the wheels of racism on its head: *“one day right there in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers. I have a dream today.”*

So how will you use your tongue sparingly? Hopefully for the glory of God, to lift up those created in his image and not tear down.

Your turn

What will you now do differently? Examples to think about include:

- In what situations do you find yourself chattering endlessly? How can you reduce?
- Who have you recently “cut down” with your tongue, someone who you now need to lift up with words of hope and a speech full of grace?
- What will be the greatest speech of your life? The one for which you will be remembered and hence bring the greatest glory to God and impact your fellow men. When will you begin writing it? It can be a prayer, an article or for that next public event.

Write here

Notes

ⁱ Emelie Sande in her song “Read all about it (part III), 2012”

ⁱⁱ <https://writingexplained.org/idiom-dictionary/children-should-be-seen-and-not-heard>

ⁱⁱⁱ Matthew 15:17-19 NKJV <http://bible.com/114/mat.15.17-19.nkjv>

^{iv} <https://www.webmd.com/balance/features/positive-self-talk>

^v <https://www.gotquestions.org/positive-confession.html>

^{vi} Adapted from James 3: 6

^{vii} Paraphrase from Romans 4: 17

^{viii} Ecclesiastes 5:2 NKJV <http://bible.com/114/ecc.5.2.nkjv>

^{ix} Proverbs 25:18 NLT <http://bible.com/116/pro.25.18.nlt>

^x Proverbs 25:28 NLT <http://bible.com/116/pro.25.28.nlt>

^{xi} James 1:19 NKJV <http://bible.com/114/jas.1.19.nkjv>

^{xii} Colossians 4:5-6 MSG <http://bible.com/97/col.4.5-6.msg>

^{xiii} EPHESIANS 4:29 AMP <http://bible.com/1588/eph.4.29.amp>

^{xiv} <https://www.artofmanliness.com/articles/the-35-greatest-speeches-in-history/>