



30-Day Power of Words Challenge

Day 1—A Devastating Fire

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! And the tongue is a fire. —James 3:5–6

On August 24, 2000, a forty-six-year-old woman tossed a burning match onto the ground when she stopped by the road to light a cigarette. Rather than putting out the burning match, she just glanced at it and left the area.¹ Many days later, the fire she had recklessly begun was finally contained. Timber worth more than 40 million dollars was destroyed, and over 80,000 acres were burned.

It's easy to hear this story and think, *How dare she leave a burning match in a dry forest?* Yet how often do we throw out our words without thinking about the consequences? We may even walk away after saying words that deeply wound others—not wanting to look at the enormous damage we've caused.

Too often I talk without thinking, never considering the one receiving my words. It's easy to blurt out words when we're under pressure. Although we may have no intention of hurting others, our words can inflict great damage. Much like a burned forest, the damage can take years to restore.

Make It Personal

Recall a time when the words you said resulted in consequences you didn't intend. What happened? How can you choose to encourage someone with your words today?

¹ Rubel Shelly, Nashville, Tennessee; "Wyoming Woman Accused of Starting South Dakota Wildfire," CNN.com.

Taken from *The Power of Words* by Nancy Leigh DeMoss

Day 2—Turning Our Tongues

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. —James 3:4

On September 26, 2000, the Greek ferry *MS Express Samina* struck a rocky islet and sank, killing eighty-two people. This tragic event could have been avoided—if the captain had manned the bridge as was required. Instead, he left the vessel on autopilot.

The captain made all kinds of excuses for his behavior. But he was the captain. It was his responsibility to drive that ship.

We also need to accept responsibility for how we pilot our mouths. What comes out of our mouths—what we say and how we respond to circumstances—is *our* responsibility.

- Your husband doesn't "make" you say nasty things. You *choose* to say nasty things.
- Your children don't "make" you irritable and snappy. You *choose* to pilot your tongue that way.
- That aggravating coworker isn't responsible for your behind-the-back cutting remarks. You *choose* to pilot your tongue onto the rocks of slander and criticism.

Your tongue is your primary steering mechanism—it determines your direction. But the truth is, we don't have the strength to manage the wheel correctly. So we must get help. And help is available—from Someone whose words are flawless.

The Lord will arm you with strength, help you turn your tongue in the right direction, and make your way perfect—if you let Him. Today, make the choice to let your heavenly Father steer your words.

Make It Personal

As you look back on your life, where has your tongue "steered" you—into trouble, or into calm waters? What can you do today to turn your tongue in the right direction?

Adapted from *Conversation Peace* by Mary Kassian

Day 3—Living with Consequences

A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit. —Proverbs 15:4

Our words can do enormous damage. Even one thoughtless word has consequences. Proverbs 15:4 reminds us that wholesome words give life. It's hard to believe that the same tongue that speaks those life-giving words can also speak words that bring destruction.

Perhaps you heard such destructive words as a child . . . words you've never been able to forget. Even though you know today that those words weren't true, they still hurt deeply. You can still hear them ring in your heart: *You're dumb. You won't amount to anything. I wish you'd never been born.*

We can't control the words that are spoken to us. But we can focus on the words that we say to others. Sometimes it's easy for me to say careless or destructive words without thinking when I'm with those I know the best. It's when I'm with my family, a close

friend, or a dear colleague that I often let down my guard and say discouraging, impatient words—words that wound rather than heal.

Many times we are blinded concerning how our words offend. We need to ask the Lord to open our eyes to ways that our words are hurtful or damaging. May our words give grace, blessing, and hope to those around us.

Make It Personal

Think about the words you've spoken in the past twenty-four hours—at home, work, church, on the phone, etc. Were your words life giving or destructive? Ask the Lord to show you any adjustments you need to make in what you say or in how you say it.

Taken from *The Power of Words* by Nancy Leigh DeMoss

Day 4—A Well-Trained Tongue

If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. . . . So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. —James 3:3, 5

The average human tongue is four inches long. It contains eight muscles and weighs only two and a half ounces. Yet this small part of the body has tremendous potential for good or bad.

James maintains that a controlled tongue is like a well-trained horse. When we put bits into the mouths of horses and train them to obey us, we are able to turn the direction of the whole animal. A trained animal can pull a plow or a wagon, carry a rider to his destination, or provide the energy needed to do chores. The energy of an untrained horse can't be harnessed for productive work. Loosed, it would run through the street wildly, causing damage and chaos.

It's the same way with our tongues. Free and untamed, our words can cause lots of damage. According to James, godliness involves bridling the free, uninhibited nature of the tongue and actively controlling the direction of our speech so that it becomes productive instead of destructive. We need to put our hand to the reins, take control of our words, and steer them in a positive direction.

But how do we begin? Changing our words from evil to good requires time, energy, and commitment. But above all it requires that we study what God has to say about how to use our mouths and then rely on Him to help us use them in the right way.

Make It Personal

How have you seen the power of words—for good or for evil—in your life? What can you do today to help you take control of your words and use them for good?

Adapted from *Conversation Peace* by Mary Kassian

Day 5—The Power to Heal

Gracious words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body. — Proverbs 16:24

Sit back, and close your eyes. Recall a time when someone said words that really encouraged you. Perhaps it was your mom or dad who said, “I believe in you!” Or maybe a good friend uttered those needed words of affirmation, “Don’t give up! You can do it.” Or possibly a teacher’s words were all you needed when she said, “You have a real gift in this area!”

I can’t see you, but you probably have a smile on your face! Scripture tells us, “Gracious words are alike a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body.” Notice the relationship between the body and soul—we can’t separate the two. Sweet words can minister spiritual and physical blessing and health.

Honey is a natural sweetener that boosts energy. Likewise, words of encouragement boost our spirits. I’m so grateful for people who speak affirming words into my life. I thank God for the healing words of my family and friends. But I don’t want to just be the beneficiary of encouragement. I want to be an encourager to others.

May we speak healing words that promote good health—words filled with grace, blessing, and hope.

Make It Personal

Think of someone who needs encouragement today. Jot down a plan for sharing healing words with this person, and then follow your plan.

Taken from *The Power of Words* by Nancy Leigh DeMoss

Day 6—Superior Quality

The tongue of the righteous is choice silver. —Proverbs 10:20

There are more than 100 references to the tongue in the book of Proverbs. In that book alone, I counted twelve verses where the word “heart” is mentioned in connection with the tongue.

Godly people speak out of the overflow of a godly heart. They are spiritually minded and don’t just speak about spiritual things on Sundays. They are restrained and think before they speak. Proverbs describes the tongue of the righteous as choice silver.

So *how do people get tongues of righteousness?* Well, their hearts are connected to the Source of wisdom and grace—the One who reveals Himself in Scripture.

I want to be a wise, godly woman, but I don't always want to pay the price for a heart of wisdom. It takes discipline and effort to fill our hearts with God's Word—and to have a tongue that is choice silver.

“Choice silver”—think about these two words. Silver, of course, is a prized metal. The tongue of the righteous is excellent, superior, worthy—it is *choice* silver—it was been carefully refined and is of the highest possible quality.

A heart that is rooted in the Word and character of God will bring forth words that are superior quality. Those words will be of great value to those who hear them.

Make It Personal

What are some specific ways your words can bless and enrich the lives of those around you today? What practical things can you do to draw upon the Source of wisdom and grace?

Taken from *The Power of Words* by Nancy Leigh DeMoss

Day 7—A Good Report

I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. —Ephesians 1:16

Although it happened more than two decades ago, it seems like yesterday. I had been unjustly slandered; my reputation and my pride had been hurt. Although I was devastated at the time, I can look back and see how God used that incident to mature me in several areas. One valuable lesson I learned was the damage we do when we spread an “evil report” about another person.

There have been times when I have put another servant of the Lord in a bad light by repeating needless information. As a result, I have had to make calls and write letters asking for forgiveness. Having to humble myself and deal with those issues has caused me to be more careful about what I say about others!

If we approach God in humility, He will convict us when our words do not please Him. Ask, “Is this a good report of this person? Have I verified the facts? Are my words kind and necessary?”

Here's a good test for both our thoughts and our words: “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things” (Phil. 4:8).

Make It Personal

Have your words this week been true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable? Are you inclined to focus on the excellent things and those things worthy of praise, or do you tend to focus on negative things you can complain about?

Taken from *The Power of Words* by Nancy Leigh DeMoss

Day 8—Heart Conditions

The heart of the wise makes his speech judicious and adds persuasiveness to his lips. — Proverbs 16:23

Do you sometimes trivialize your words by saying things like, “I didn’t mean that. It just came out”? Unfortunately, the truth is that we really do mean what we say—our words reveal what’s really in our hearts.

I think about careless or hurtful words I have said to family members, coworkers, and friends—words I regret and wish I could take back. But we can’t take back our words.

According to God’s Word, all of us sin with our tongues (James 3:2); we need to confess our sin and turn from it. We need to take responsibility for our words, agree with God about what our words reveal about our hearts, and ask the Lord to change our hearts so we can speak words that heal.

Today, may we allow God to transform our hearts by the power of His Holy Spirit. When our hearts are filled with Him and with His wisdom and grace, we will speak wise, gracious words that bless and instruct others.

Make It Personal

Think of a time when someone spoke wise words of instruction to you. How did these words affect your life?

Taken from *The Power of Words* by Nancy Leigh DeMoss

Day 9—A Spiritual Barometer

With [the tongue] we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. —James 3:9–10

In the above verses, James is addressing an inconsistency he saw in the lives of his Christian friends. The way they talked to God was healthy and positive, but the way they talked to people was unhealthy and negative.

When your words are unkind, impatient, critical, sarcastic, deceitful, or rude, it’s an indication that something in your heart isn’t right—and that you have some growing up to do.

You may have devotions every morning, lead a Bible study, and go to church every week. But the way you speak to your family and to your coworkers, your neighbors, and your enemies . . . that’s where the rubber hits the road!

Your mouth is like a spiritual barometer. It reveals what's really going on under the surface. James says, "If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless" (1:26).

Do you have a problem with your mouth? Then most likely there's also a problem in your heart. Ask God to give you what you need to control your tongue. As you rely on Him, He will change you from the inside out, transform your speech, and bring you more conversation peace.

Make It Personal

Today, do your best to keep track of what kind of words come out of your mouth. Are they mostly positive . . . or do they fall on the opposite end of the spectrum? If you realize you *do* have a problem with your mouth, ask God to examine your heart and show you anything He finds that isn't pleasing to Him. Then ask Him to transform you from the inside out.

Adapted from *Conversation Peace* by Mary Kassian

Day 10—Perfect Noonday

"For I the LORD do not change." —*Malachi 3:6*

We live in a world that is constantly changing. Innovative technology, updated styles, news at a moment's notice—sometimes it seems that nothing stays the same.

Yet Scripture tells us that the Lord never changes! He is "the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb. 13:8). The Lord is not like shifting sand. He is perfect noonday. There is no shadow of truth with our Lord. He does not flip-flop on issues, depending on His audience. He is always true.

I cannot say that my words have always been true. As a young woman in my twenties, wanting to make a good impression on others, I would sometimes exaggerate the truth. God showed me that my pride had resulted in a root of deception in my heart. By His grace, God granted me repentance. Over a period of time, He removed those roots of deceit and replaced them with truthfulness.

Spiritual victories are won when we speak the truth. In real life, it often seems that people who lie succeed. But Proverbs says that in the long run, the effect of true words will be enduring and those who deceive will not last.

Make It Personal

"Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, but those who act faithfully are his delight" (Prov. 12:22). Think of a time when you (or someone you know) told the truth—even though the truth hurt. What was the result?

Taken from *The Power of Words* by Nancy Leigh DeMoss

Day 11—To Tell the Truth

Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things. —Hebrews 13:18

This particular church service was some twenty years ago, but I can still remember how miserable I was sitting in that pew, under the heavy hand of the Spirit's conviction. You see, a few years earlier, as a college student, I had lied on a number of weekly reports we had to turn in to our department. I knew I had to go back to my professor and make it right.

Because of my desire to be completely truthful in my communication, when I was a young woman, the Lord led me to make the following commitment: *to speak the truth to every person, in every situation, regardless of the cost*. I have also committed that *anytime I fail to speak the truth, I will go back and make it right*. I've had to confess being untruthful, both privately and publicly. As a result, I've experienced the great freedom and joy of having a clear conscience before God and others.

As we get the truth of God's Word into our hearts, it protects us from deception and from sinning with our tongues. Sometimes it's hard to speak the truth. But the consequences of lying are ultimately more costly than the consequences of speaking the truth.

Make It Personal

"Deliver me, O LORD . . . from a deceitful tongue" (Ps. 120:2). Deception can be attempting to create a better impression than is honestly true, being silent when we hear people say untruths about others or covering up past sins. Ask God to reveal any deception in your life.

Taken from *The Power of Words* by Nancy Leigh DeMoss

Day 12—Vital Information

Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets, but he who is trustworthy in spirit keeps a thing covered. —Proverbs 11:13

I chuckled as I watched an old episode of *I Love Lucy*, in which Lucy hung up from talking to Ethel on the phone, and Ricky asked Lucy, "Were you gossiping?"

Lucy answered, "*Who me? Gossiping?* I prefer to think of it as a 'mutual exchange of vital information.' Anyway, *she* was gossiping; I was just listening. That isn't gossip!"

Although we find Lucy entertaining, gossip is no laughing matter. Scripture tells us that a gossip cannot be trusted and betrays confidential information. Before repeating information, ask yourself, "Would the person who originally shared the information (or prayer request) give me permission to repeat it?"

Proverbs 17:4 says, “An evildoer listens to wicked lips, and a liar gives ear to a mischievous tongue.” It’s not only wrong to gossip, but it’s also wrong to listen to gossip. When we do, our ears become like garbage cans.

When we spread gossip or slander about a fellow believer, we are actually sinning against our own body—for as Christians, we are all part of the Body of Christ.

Second Samuel 7:28 says, “O Lord GOD, you are God, and your words are true.” When I hear or repeat information, I want people to know that I am trustworthy—that I will speak only words that prosper others.

Make It Personal

“Whoever covers an offense seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates close friends” (Prov. 17:9). Describe an instance when you saw this verse illustrated. How can you protect against gossip (either speaking or listening to it) in your own life?

Taken from *The Power of Words* by Nancy Leigh DeMoss

Day 13—Swords into Plowshares

There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. —Proverbs 12:18

In the ancient world, swords were the most common weapons of war. The Bible tells us that during war, the Hebrews would make swords from their plowshares (Joel 3:10). A plowshare is the cutting edge of a plow—the agricultural tool that cuts furrows in the soil and prepares the ground for planting.

The edge of the plow cuts through the ground like a rudder cuts through the water. It has this cutting edge that the Hebrews used to make swords. When peace returned, the Hebrews hammered the swords back into plows (Isa. 2:4; Mic. 4:3). The edge that killed the enemy in times of war was the same edge that, in times of peace, provided the Hebrew community with food. The sharp edge had two functions.

Like the edge of a sword and a plow, our tongues can operate in one of two ways. We can declare war and use the edge to pierce, wound, and kill, or we can use our tongues as an instrument of peace, tilling the soil of our relationships to make them rich and fruitful.

The Bible says if you live by the sword you will die by the sword (2 Sam. 12:10; Prov. 26:27). If you choose to use your tongue as a sword, your relationships will experience “perpetual calamity.” On the other hand, if you choose to put your sword into its sheath (a mark of peace and friendship—Jer. 47:6), pound it into a plow, and begin to till the soil of your relationships, you will reap rich rewards (see Prov. 12:14).

Make It Personal

Consider the words that came out of your mouth in the past few days. Were there times when you used your mouth as a sword? To whom were you talking? Can you think of

instances when you used the edge of your tongue in a positive way—to open up the soil of your relationships, helping them become rich and fruitful?

Adapted from *Conversation Peace* by Mary Kassian

Day 14—An Index of Our Souls

The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the LORD, but gracious words are pure.
—Proverbs 15:26

St. Frances de Sales said, “Our words are a faithful index of the state of our souls.” During the past few weeks of this challenge, we’ve examined the words of our mouths and recognized a correlation between what we say and our hearts. Today, I want you to examine yourself—to take an index of your soul.

Below, you will find a list of several heart conditions, along with the words that flow out of each type of heart. Write down all of the types of heart conditions that describe you.

Foolish heart/words

- Critical heart ~ critical words
- Mean heart ~ mean-spirited words
- Proud heart ~ arrogant words
- Unloving heart ~ unkind words
- Self-centered heart ~ self-centered words
- Angry heart ~ angry words
- Profane heart ~ profane words
- Impatient heart ~ impatient words
- Discontented heart ~ complaining words
- Deceitful heart ~ deceitful words

Wise heart/words

- Spiritual heart ~ spiritual words
- Kind heart ~ kind words
- Humble heart ~ humble words
- Loving heart ~ loving words
- Unselfish heart ~ other-centered words
- Gracious heart ~ gracious words
- Pure heart ~ pure words
- Patient heart ~ patient words
- Grateful heart ~ thankful words
- Honest heart ~ truthful words

Make It Personal

“Search me, O God, and know my heart!” (Ps. 139:23). Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the index of your soul as you prayerfully review the heart conditions you marked in today’s challenge. What is God saying to you?

Taken from *The Power of Words* by Nancy Leigh DeMoss

Day 15—Clean Hearts

“The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil.” —Matthew 12:35

The Pharisees were a Jewish sect noted for their strict interpretation and observance of religious law. They were religious perfectionists. They had all sorts of rules about what was and wasn't acceptable behavior.

But the Pharisees were only concerned that things looked good on the outside—that their actions and words appeared proper to onlookers. The problem was, they cleaned up the outside to look good, but the inside was still full of sin.

Jesus' standards for cleanliness went far beyond the standards of the Pharisees. The Pharisees merely demanded that things be done right on the outside. Jesus, however, taught that things must first be right on the inside. According to Jesus, external symbols of holiness—doing the right things and saying the right words—are of no worth if the thoughts and attitudes of our hearts are not right. He told the Pharisees, "First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean" (Matt. 23:26).

How does Jesus' advice relate to our speech?

When the thoughts and attitudes of our hearts are clean and pure, our words will also be clean and pure. If the inside sparkles, then the outside sparkles, too!

Jesus wants you to be clean—inside and out! And as the thoughts and attitudes rooted in your heart become clean and more beautiful, your words will also increase in beauty.

Make It Personal

Are you more concerned with how things look on the outside than with the condition of your heart? Ask God to examine your heart to show you anything that is "unclean." Then ask Him to make your heart clean and beautiful—and have that beauty become evident in your words.

Adapted from *Conversation Peace* by Mary Kassian

Day 16—A Guarded Tongue

Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips! —Psalm 141:3

The presence of a guard indicates the possibility of danger. We don't guard something that doesn't need to be protected.

Notice where this guard is posted. Not at the ear—to protect us from being hurt by words we might hear, or at the heart—to shield us from the wounds that are sometimes caused by what others do. Rather, the Psalmist asked God to post a sentinel at his own mouth knowing that the greatest danger he faced was not what others might do to him, but rather what he might say that would harm others.

Our tongues can be dangerous weapons. Careless, harsh, or untimely words inflict pain on those who hear. “And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness . . . setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell” (James 3:6).

Too often we let our words run unrestrained. Even though we may later regret our words, we can never take them back. Better to set a guard at our mouth, preventing the danger from getting loose, than trying furiously to “take back” words we never should have spoken in the first place.

Make It Personal

“Whoever keeps his mouth and his tongue keeps himself out of trouble” (Prov. 21:23).
What can you do today to guard your words?

Taken from *The Power of Words* by Nancy Leigh DeMoss

Day 17—Hold That Tongue

The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things. —Proverbs 15:28

A New Jersey teen, Brett Banfe, decided that he was spending too much time talking and too little time listening to others. So he took a vow of silence for a year.¹

After reading about Brett’s feat, I decided to take a vow of silence myself—for just forty hours. I didn’t think it would be too hard—since I was by myself the entire time (though I’ll confess I did talk to myself twice!).

That reminds me of an old story of a monk who joined a monastery where he was permitted to say only two words every ten years. After ten years, the monk said, “Bed hard!” Ten more years passed, and the monk said, “Food bad!” Finally after ten more years, the monk spoke for the third time: “I quit!” His superior shook his head and said, “I’m not surprised. All he did for the past thirty years was complain!”

Holding our tongues is a challenge! Proverbs 29:11 says, “A fool gives full vent to his spirit, but a wise man quietly holds it back.” What would an impartial observer say about your tongue? Do you say everything (or almost everything) that you think or feel? Or do you carefully choose and measure your words?

Make It Personal

What are some practical ways you can hold your tongue today? How will these ways help communication?

¹ Cesar Soraino, “Vow of silence ends in torrent,” *USA Today*, Arlington, VA, September 6, 2001.

Taken from *The Power of Words* by Nancy Leigh DeMoss

Day 18—Silence Is Golden

When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent. —Proverbs 10:19

After participating in a several-hour meeting some time ago, I sensed that perhaps I had said more than I should have. I asked one of the men who was in the meeting if I had talked too much. He said, “Well, perhaps you could have condensed that long story you told!”

I am so thankful to have real friends who will help me know when I’m not walking wisely, in accordance with the Word of God. God wants our lips to be controlled by the Holy Spirit. We need His wisdom and grace to measure our words and to speak to others only after listening to Him.

People who are measured in their words are thought to be wise. Many women express frustration that their husbands don’t listen to them. I don’t mean to be unkind, but sometimes I wonder if men might listen more attentively if we women didn’t have so much to say!

Make It Personal

At the end of the day, ask the Lord to bring to your mind those moments when you spoke too many words. What would have been a better response?

Taken from *The Power of Words* by Nancy Leigh DeMoss

Day 19—Soft Answers

A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. —Proverbs 15:1

When you turn on the television and listen to the way people speak to each other, you’re likely to hear a lot of harsh, rough, angry words.

A soft or gentle answer can defuse a tense situation, but fighting words generally produce a fight! Now this doesn’t mean that you should avoid speaking the truth. But, as we are reminded in Ephesians 4:15, we should speak the truth in love. Sometimes it’s not so much the *words* that we say as the *spirit* in which they’re said.

The men of Ephraim were easily angered and offended (see Judg. 8:1–3). Yet Gideon defused their anger with a humble word. Likewise, we can create a calm climate in our homes by the way we respond to those around us, even if they are not acting as they should.

Soft, gentle words minister grace, strength, and encouragement. Try saying some of these gentle words to those around you today (beginning with those within the four walls of your home!): *I love you. . . . I’m praying for you. . . . I’m so proud of you. . . . I’m sorry I treated you that way. . . . Would you please forgive me? . . . I appreciate you. . . . You’re such a blessing!*

Make It Personal

How does the atmosphere of your home change when you use soft, gentle words, instead of harsh or angry words?

Taken from *The Power of Words* by Nancy Leigh DeMoss

Day 20—A High Gate

“Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit . . . let him seek peace and pursue it.” —1 Peter 3:10–11

When I was young, I loved to watch a children’s television program called *The Friendly Giant*. Every day at 10:00, I watched in fascination as the drawbridge of the giant’s castle was lowered and the gates opened to allow the young viewers to enter in. At the end of the show, the massive gates slowly closed and the drawbridge lifted, closing the giant off from the outside world.

And just like that gate, our words can either pridefully shut people out—or humbly invite them in.

We all have some “high gates” we erect with our mouths. I like to call one of them the gate of battle. It means we enter conversations with our swords drawn. Even if we don’t strike, our battle mentality causes us to assume a posture where we’re armed and prepared to defend or attack.

We bar our gates, fortify our defenses, attack, and do battle—even with those we love the most. But why? According to James 4:1–3, fights and quarrels result when:

- We don’t get something we want.
- We can’t have what we want.
- We envy those who have what we want.
- We look to people instead of to God for what we want.
- We regard our own pleasure as the highest goal.

Opening our gates opens the way for God to work in our lives. In order to do so, we must—in wisdom and humility—cultivate a spirit of peace. Peace brings down barriers. It destroys dividing walls of hostility. With God’s peace, we can have a tranquil spirit that is neither defensive or combative. And when we choose to pursue peace and promote it in our communication with others, the Bible promises that we will have joy (Prov. 12:20).

Make It Personal

Read 1 Peter 3:8–18, and write down all of the ways we can pursue peace. How can you choose to live this out today in your communication with others?

Adapted from *Conversation Peace* by Mary Kassian

Day 21—One Small Tongue

Whoever keeps his mouth and his tongue keeps himself out of trouble. —Proverbs 21:23

One September 11, 1995, a squirrel climbed onto the Metro-North Railroad power lines near New York City. This set off an electrical surge, which weakened an overhead bracket, which let a wire dangle toward the tracks, which tangled in a train, which tore down all the lines. As a result, 47,000 commuters were stuck in Manhattan for hours that evening.¹

This story reminds me of what we've seen in our study of the tongue. Something very small can cause a lot of damage!

We might think, *It's just a tiny lie, a little argument, a few contentious words . . .* Yet we're reminded time and time again in Scripture that if we guard our mouths and tongues from saying words we'll later regret, we will save ourselves from disaster.

James 3:5 tells us that “the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire!”

Innocent loved ones can be harmed because of our ill-spoken words. The life of a living child, loyal spouse, or committed friend may be wounded because of just a “little” reckless word.

Make It Personal

“There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing” (Prov. 12:18). How can you avoid blurting out reckless, piercing words today?

¹ UTU News, www.utu.org, Volume 27, November 1195, Number 11.

Taken from *The Power of Words* by Nancy Leigh DeMoss

Day 22—Examine the Soil

“Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit. . . . For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.”
—Matthew 12:33–34

After several years of battle, my husband, Brent, was finally successful in getting rid of the fairy rings in our yard. These circles of dark green grass, mushrooms, or brown, dead grass appear when fungal spores infect the soil. And to get rid of them, you need to dig deep, making sure you remove all the infected soil.

It's the same way with our hearts. Changing your words can certainly influence your attitudes and beliefs, but the most profound change happens from the bottom up. Until

the polluted soil in your heart is cleaned out, changing your words just surface dresses the problem.

So where do you start?

If you want to really see your speech transformed, you need to look under the surface of your words to examine the attitudes and deep beliefs in your heart. And then to truly change, you need God's help. Thankfully He does not give up on us, but is committed to help us purify our heart's ground.

Make It Personal

If you notice that your words are snarky, malicious, critical, biting, or caustic, take some time to pull up that foul plant and examine the roots and the soil underneath.

- Ask the Lord to give you insight.
- Ask Him to point out any areas where your attitudes and thoughts do not line up with His standard.
- Then dig out that tainted soil of deceit through confession and repentance.

Adapted from *Conversation Peace* by Mary Kassian

Day 23—Filling Your Garden

Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. —Ephesians 4:29

The most beautiful garden I've ever seen is located in Western Canada on Vancouver Island. What makes it particularly remarkable is that the site was once a big eyesore. That's because in the early 1900s, the land was used as a quarry to provide limestone and clay for a nearby cement plant. But Jennie Butchart, the wife of the quarry owner, decided to make some changes. She planted countless varieties of trees, plants, and shrubs in colorful, brilliant combinations, transforming this ugly abandoned quarry into a spectacular welcoming garden!

Empty spaces beg to be filled. If Jennie Butchart hadn't filled the quarry with good soil and beautiful plants, the space would have filled up with dust, weeds, and stinky slough water.

When it comes to our hearts, it isn't enough to clean out the bad. We need to intentionally fill up those spaces with good seeds that will grow and fill the garden of our hearts with beauty.

Ephesians 4 talks about what the process looks like. God wants us to dig out the weeds of bitterness, animosity, outrage, antagonism, irritation, yelling, rankling, petulance, indignation, tantrums, and lies—all types of speech that grieve Him. Instead we are to

fill our garden with new things—speech that is wholesome, healthy, and beneficial, words that fit the occasion and minister God’s grace to the hearer.

Your speech transformation project won’t happen overnight. To see results, it’s something you’ll continually need to work on. But if you cooperate with God’s transformation—by putting off the old and filling your heart and your mouth with good, new things—your garden will be filled with beauty.

Make It Personal

Putting off the old and filling our heart and mouth with new things means that we dress our minds with new thoughts. The apostle Paul explains that this involves replacing patterns of falsehood with patterns of truth (Eph. 4:25). Take a moment right now to take captive your thoughts and bind them with truth. Ask God’s Spirit to guide you. Every time you think a thought that is out of line with God’s truth, ask Him to help you grab hold of that thought and put it back in place.

Adapted from *Conversation Peace* by Mary Kassian

Day 24—Wise Reproof

Like a gold ring or an ornament of gold is a wise reproof to a listening ear. —Proverbs 25:12

Someone has said, “The last person to know he’s got a rip in his jacket is the guy who’s got it on!” I need friends who will love me enough to tell me when they see “blind spots” in my life. And I need to be willing to be that kind of friend to others.

It’s so important to learn how to receive *and* how to give godly counsel and reproof. Most of us don’t like the idea of being rebuked. Nor do we find it easy to rebuke others. Yet a wise person’s reproof has great value and is to be desired.

According to the Scripture, a rebuke from a wise person is a gift. Imagine how grateful you would be if someone gave you an expensive, beautiful piece of gold jewelry—custom-designed for you! God does just that when we humbly receive wise reproof. And He does this for others when we offer wise reproof.

Make It Personal

“Why do you see the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?” (Matt. 7:3). Why is it so important to deal with our own failures and needs before pointing out the failures and needs of others?

Taken from *The Power of Words* by Nancy Leigh DeMoss

Day 25—The Gift of Words

To make an apt answer is a joy to a man, and a word in season, how good it is! —Proverbs 15:23

If you're like me, you enjoy giving and receiving gifts. Have you ever thought that each day God can work through you to give priceless gifts to your family, mate, children, roommate, fellow workers, neighbors, or friends? Wise, kind words are gifts that can change lives.

We have seen that words reflect our heart. Wise, kind words flow out of wise, kind hearts. When we fill our hearts with the Word of God, what flows from our heart to others will reflect Him. We're told in Proverbs 30:5, "Every word of God proves true."

When our words are sifted through God's Word, they will be cherished gifts to those we love.

Make It Personal

What would your family, friends, and colleagues say about the words of your mouth? Do they generally encourage or discourage? Do they reflect a hope in God?

Taken from *The Power of Words* by Nancy Leigh DeMoss

Day 26—Laying Down Tracks

Have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called. —1 Peter 3:8–9

In what was called "an act of insane recklessness," Prime Minister John A. MacDonald, the first leader of Canada, promised the colony of British Columbia that if they would join the country, he would build them a Pacific railroad in less than ten years. In spite of opposition and great obstacles, on November 7, 1885, the last spike was driven on Canada's transcontinental rail line.

Just as John MacDonald had a vision to link eastern Canada to the Western Coast, the Bible presents a vision for God's people to be joined together with bonds far stronger than a steel railway.

First Peter 3:8–11 gives us a vision for what can be achieved in relationships: unity, harmony, sympathy, love, tenderheartedness, blessing, and peace. Doesn't that sound attractive? Don't you long for those things in your relationships?

Our words can lay tracks toward deeper understanding, deeper intimacy and deeper commitment . . . even with people who are very different than us.

We are called to lay tracks of faithfulness—to faithfully bless others with our words. Then we are to lay tracks of honesty—to say what we mean, mean what we say, and base our words on God's standard.

The third necessity is that we lay tracks of tenderheartedness—that we not respond to

injury or offense with ill feelings, ill thoughts, ill speech, or ill intentions.

And the most critical necessity is a willingness to pay the price. Laying tracks into people's lives isn't cheap. It might require that I give up my own agenda, my own interests, my pride, my "right" to be right.

Laying tracks to connect with others isn't easy. This speech transformation project requires a lifelong commitment and constant expenditure. You may stand at the beginning of the line, look at all the distance that needs to be spanned, and feel totally overwhelmed. But remember, a railway isn't built in an instant. It's laid down one tie at a time.

Make It Personal

Take time to reflect on 1 Peter 3:8–11 and write down practical ways you can use your words to lay tracks of faithfulness, honesty, and tenderheartedness in your relationships with others.

Adapted from *Conversation Peace* by Mary Kassian

Day 27—Time for a Check-Up

If you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, then you will understand the fear of the LORD. —Proverbs 2:4–5

Have you ever lost something precious and you couldn't rest until it was found? Perhaps you misplaced a family heirloom, an expensive piece of jewelry, or a cherished letter.

If you've had such an experience, you know what it's like to look for something as though it were hidden treasure—leaving, as they say, no stone unturned.

During the past few weeks, we've traveled through the book of Proverbs and other Scripture, searching for treasure that will benefit not only ourselves, but also those around us. We've spent almost four weeks together, and it's time for a check-up.

You will find two lists below. One illustrates pleasant/sweet words, and the other describes some wrong ways to use words. Which ones describe how you have used words during the past few days? No one will judge your answers—this check-up is just for you.

Wrong Use of Words

- Gossiping
- Constant talking
- Giving false witness
- Rough, angry words
- Boasting
- Quarreling
- Insincere, flattering words
- Lying

- Slanderous words

Pleasant/Sweet Words

- Speaking well of the subject of gossip
- Patient listening
- Making a good report on someone
- Gentle, quiet words
- Bragging on others
- Mending a quarrel

- Sincere praise
- Loving truth
- Uplifting words

Make It Personal

“Whoever restrains his words has knowledge, and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding” (Prov. 17:27). Have your words this week revealed a person of knowledge and understanding? Why or why not? What can you do today to help yourself be an even-tempered person?

Taken from *The Power of Words* by Nancy Leigh DeMoss

Day 28—Think on These Things

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. —Philippians 4:8

In his wonderful book *The Seeking Heart*, Fenelon gives this wise counsel: “What you really need to do is sit quietly before God and your active and argumentative mind would soon be calmed. God can teach you to look at each matter with a simple, clear view.”¹

When my mind gets “active and argumentative” (which actually happened within the past hour!), I’m not usually inclined to be calm and sit quietly before the Lord. Yet that’s exactly what we need to do.

Philippians 4:8 tells us to think on the things that are virtuous and of good report. It’s no secret that our thoughts reveal themselves in actions . . . and in words. What we think about will ultimately drive what we say and what we do. So if we want to speak words that are true, pure, lovely, etc., we need to fill our mind with those kinds of thoughts!

Our thoughts—and our words—will be transformed as we spend time sitting (or kneeling) quietly before the Lord, letting Him teach us and showing us His view of things, as we meditate on His Word.

Make It Personal

Before you go to bed tonight, jot down thoughts you had today that were:

- true
- honest
- just
- pure
- lovely
- of good report.

¹ Fenelon, *The Seeking Heart* (Jacksonville: Christian Books Publishing House, 1992). p. 111.

Taken from *The Power of Words* by Nancy Leigh DeMoss

Day 29—The Perfect Word

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. —John 1:14

When it comes to learning character and life skills, choosing the right instructor is particularly important. Scripture demonstrates that Jesus is the only person suitable for the job. He is gentle, humble, and a master of excellent speech. For apprenticeship in communication, there is no better teacher.

Jesus is a gentle and humble teacher. But the reason He's the master speech instructor is because He is "the Word" that was sent from God (John 1:14). Jesus is the "Word." He is the communication of God to humanity. The apostle John gives us a great overview of what this perfect Word is like (John 1:1-14). The Word of God is:

- creative and constructive (v. 3)
- powerful and effective (v. 3; see also Heb. 1:3)
- life giving (v. 4)
- enlightening (v. 9)
- victorious (v. 5).
- loving (v. 11)
- full of glory (v. 14)
- full of grace (v. 14)
- full of truth (v. 14)

Wow! Isn't that incredible? Jesus is the perfect Word. And that's why He's the perfect instructor of our speech. His apprentices will learn to have speech that is creative, constructive, powerful, effective, life giving, enlightening, victorious, and loving. Like Him, their speech will be filled with glory, grace, and truth.

Make It Personal

The word *apprentice* comes from the French word *apprendre*: "to learn." An apprentice is one who is put under the care of a skilled master for the purpose of learning a trade or profession. What can you do this week to truly live as an apprentice of Jesus, particularly when it comes to the words that you speak?

Adapted from *Conversation Peace* by Mary Kassian

Day 30—Fragrant Words

But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. —2 Corinthians 2:14-15

As we have studied various Proverbs relating to the tongue, mouth, and lips, I am more aware than ever of my need for God to keep watch over my speech. My natural self wants to blurt out words, without thinking of how they will affect others. But the Holy Spirit reminds me that my words and life can be a sweet aroma of Christ.

When we speak words that are encouraging, wise, fitting, and true, it is because of His amazing grace. It is because He has opened our eyes and hearts to the truth. I love the first stanza of John Newton's "Amazing Grace":

*Amazing grace—how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost but now am found,
Was blind but now I see.*

Although this challenge is coming to a close, our journey to glorify God with our tongues has just begun.

May you and I begin to sing and speak God's praises each day that He gives us breath, as we will spend an eternity doing in heaven! May we honor Him with our words in such a way that people marvel, "Hallelujah, what a Savior!"

Make It Personal

What are some specific things you will do to continue your journey to glorify God with your tongue?

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