

A young man with short, spiky brown hair and a dark blue hoodie is holding a large, white, speech bubble-shaped sign with both hands. The sign has a black outline and contains the text 'The Power of the TONGUE' in blue. The man is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. The background is plain white.

The Power of the
TONGUE

**Do you think before you speak? Do you mean what you say?
How to choose words that build others up, not tear them down.**

A Note from Julie Elias



Dear Friends,

For most of my life, I felt like God was writing some really exciting chapters. I have had some wonderful experiences and a lot of cool stories. But chapters don't mean as much if you don't know what that whole book is about. It was frustrating. Though I've been a Christian since a young age, I didn't know God's overall, big-picture plan for my life. Praying for answers a few years ago, a plot began to develop that I never had imagined. Turns out, every chapter taught me something that shaped who I have become and equipped me to be where I am today, even when I didn't understand it.

I can only imagine what kinds of temptation and danger you all face every day. They say it's worse now than ever before. I want to encourage you to find your relationship with Christ NOW so you have a strong foundation that guides everything you say and do. Being a teen is hard; I remember, I was there once. But being an adult is hard, too. Life is hard. The sooner you have the tools and support to live a wise, godly, healthy life, the better the quality of your life will be.

My hope and prayer is that you use your life in some way for His glory, remembering every day that you are a witness of Christ's love and compassion in a world that desperately needs it. You have no clue how many lives you may impact just by being the best YOU that God wants you to be.

Thanks for your support and friendship!

Julie

Everything you say -good or bad- has a result.



DID I SAY THAT?

Words are a huge part of everyday life. It is a momentous day in a baby's life when he speaks his first word. In 1927, the world of cinema was changed forever with the advent of "talkies," movies with dialogue. World leaders have gained power through the charisma and mastery of language. Everyone from Abraham Lincoln to Adolf Hitler gained support because of their powerful speeches, although their ideologies could not have been more different. Words can be used for awesome magnificence or utter destruction... and everything in between.

Words can:

Baffle, balance, baptize, belittle, benefit, berate, bewitch, bite, blame, blast, bless, block, bolster, bond, boost, bother, break, bribe, build, burden, burn...and that's just the letter B!

For most people, speaking is the most convenient way to express your feelings. We must understand that how we talk and how we live has a big impact on the people around us. Especially non-Christians. We are supposed to strive to be like Christ and represent Him at all times. What if your careless words turn someone away from God? How sad is that! We may not like to hear it, but what lost people

think of God and the church is determined by those who call themselves Christians. James 1:26 says, "If anyone considers himself religious and does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless." Some of the most hurtful speech I have ever encountered has come from Christians. That is so backwards! People are driven away from Christianity by gossip, fighting, and ungodly language. They think, "I have enough of that in my life already, so clearly these 'Christians' don't have anything more figured out than I do."

Everything you say - good or bad - has a result. You can't know how people will interpret or react to what you say, but you are responsible for each and every word that comes out of your mouth. Matthew 12:36-37 says, "I tell you, on the Day of Judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

Yikes. But there is good news. Just because you maybe have said things in the past you regret, God gives us the gift of forgiveness. Ask His forgiveness for what you have said in the past...and then ask for His wisdom and patience to help guide what you say in

the future. When you admit what you have done wrong, you can work to fix it. You can choose to change your words from blasting to blessing.

THE WORDS AROUND YOU

If you are surrounded by obscene language, bullies, or gossiping people, you will find yourself getting caught up in it rather quickly. In fact, you may not even notice it! Have you heard the phrase, “Garbage in, garbage out”? When you hear something constantly, you become desensitized to it. Therefore, it doesn’t strike you as abnormal anymore. This becomes a huge problem when you begin saying things that you don’t even consider to be wrong or hurtful. There are two major factors that influence the words around you:

1) Your Friends: You are around your friends all day in school, probably after school and on the weekends as well. But what kind of people are your friends? You may consider yourself pretty nice to others, but if you hang out with bullies, you may pick on others

without even realizing it. If your friends always gossip, it is almost a certainty that you will do it with them. 1 Corinthians 15:33 says: “Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company ruins good morals.’” Do your friends use a lot of profanity? Hearing swear words constantly will eventually make them part of your vocabulary if you aren’t careful. It may start small, a word here or there, but soon they will become more common. Words lose their power and meaning the more that you say them. Let’s look at a non-curse word: if you constantly tell everyone you date “I love you,” then when you actually do fall in love with someone, no one will believe you. Peer pressure can have a positive effect if you are surrounded by kind and moral friends, but it can be destructive if not.

Do any of these apply to any of your friends?

- Are they irresponsible with their words?
- Do they have a lot of enemies?
- Does learning new gossip excite them?
- Have you ever caught them lying? Exaggerating?
- Do they talk badly about classmates?



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- Do they disrespect their parents?
- Have they ever hurt your feelings?
- Do they tell dirty jokes?
- Do they watch mature and R-rated films or TV?
- Do they listen to vulgar music?

2) Music, Movies, and TV: If you are listening to music that has profanity, derogatory names for women, or encourages violence, you may find yourself repeating them in your interaction with others. But this language is just as offensive as it was before you heard it in a song or from the mouth of your favorite actor. Profanity makes you sound uneducated and disrespectful. It is a result of an impulsive, uncontrolled reaction. If you have to resort to a curse word to make your point, you clearly have not thought through what you are about to say and should therefore keep quiet until you have time to think. Why are you listening to and watching these things? Does it make you feel cool? Rebellious? Grown up? There are so many other ways to enhance your reputation other than dumbing yourself down by surrounding yourself with vulgarity. Do you really enjoy

it? If so, then you need to ask yourself why, of all the media out there, you are choosing the most offensive and controversial. Deuteronomy 7:26 says this: “And you shall not bring an abominable thing into your house and become devoted to destruction like it. You shall utterly detest and abhor it, for it is devoted to destruction.” Media is a huge part of our culture, but there is plenty of creative media and art that doesn’t glorify bad behavior. Entertainment in itself is not a bad thing, but it is important to be aware of it and how it can negatively impact your own thoughts and words.

When you hear a vulgar joke and everyone around you laughs, it is easy to think, “Hey, I guess it’s not so bad after all.” Then you decide to memorize the joke and re-tell it at school. Everyone there laughs, too. Except that teacher who overheard it and sends you to the principal’s office and calls your parents. They certainly don’t find it as funny. Would Jesus laugh if He were standing next to you?

I believe that everyone reading this knows what is appropriate to say and what isn’t.

Listen to your conscience if something makes you feel uncomfortable. If necessary, remove yourself from the situation or at least work toward making those changes. Whether it is from your friends or the media, the influences around you should build you up and make you a better person. While you always need to accept responsibility for what you say, you can minimize the impact that bad influences will have on the words that come out of your mouth.

The Power of the Tongue: A Closer Look

A person who isn't mastered by Christ will be mastered by his tongue. If you have God's Word in your heart, you are far less likely to say things you regret. The Book of James is a heavy hitter on the subject. Take a minute to read James 3:1-12 and then let's look at the three points James makes:

I. Direction

We need to let God lead us, and have His Word close to our heart to guide us. A horse who

is controlled by a bit in his mouth can be of great use. But a horse who is uncontrolled can hurt others and himself. The word "bit" means "to lead." A horse will never be able to pick up a bit and bridle itself- a master must do that. In the same way, we cannot bridle our own tongues. Again, trying harder to clean up what comes out of our mouth is not the answer. We must be willing to make Jesus our master and be led or bridled by Him. James 3:3 says, "When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal." A tamed horse is no less powerful than a wild one; but now he has direction and can be put to even better use!

II. Destruction

Almost every summer horrible forest fires rage throughout California, Nevada, Colorado, and other parts of the US. Acres of forests, homes, and communities are destroyed by a single spark- a careless match, a campfire, a lightning strike. Something so small causes massive destruction. The tongue, just like fire, can get out of control and do infinite damage.

You are responsible and accountable for everything you say- and type.



James 3:5 says, "The tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark." A little white lie or gossip can grow and spread, just like a forest fire, ruining reputations and relationships.

III. Contradiction

It is a contradiction that hurtful words would come out of the mouth of someone who has Christ in their hearts. What a confusing witness this must be to lost people. James 3:9-12 continues: "With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water." Whether like a spring of water or a tree, what comes out of our mouth shows the world what is in our hearts. When these things don't make sense, we lose credibility among other people and may even turn non believers away from Christ altogether.

Hurtful Words

Have you ever heard the phrase "hurting people hurt people"? People who are hurting on the inside find a temporary fix in making others feel as badly as they do. No one wants to hurt alone. This is the psychology of bullying: If someone feels out control in their own life, they will try to control others by manipulating their feelings.

Gossip, slander, and lies are a "restless evil, full of deadly poison" (James 3:8). Not all poisons are the same. Some will kill immediately and some work very slowly. Some don't kill but torture and leave horrible scars. Whether it happens right away or over a period of weeks, or even months, our words can destroy relationships and reputations that have taken years to build. James doesn't pull any punches when he says the damage done with our tongues comes right out of Hell itself. Behind every piece of gossip, every rumor, every filthy word is Satan himself, who is in the business of destroying lives.

Unresolved anger is a big problem for many Christians. When something bad happens in your life, the natural reaction is to feel angry.



But anger is born out of fear, frustration, hurt or some combination of the three. Frustrated because you're not receiving what you had expected from other people or life; hurt when you don't get the reactions you expected or hoped for; fear that you won't ever get what you want. When you don't face your anger honestly and deal with it, there can be serious consequences in your life and others' when they become a target for your anger.

When you use words to hurt others, it tells others what kind of person you really are:

Name-calling:

What you think it is: making an observation, maybe even a joke.

What it really is: giving someone a derogatory label to make him feel lower than you.

Others see you as: judgmental, closed-minded, bullying.

Lying:

What you think it is: entertainment to get what you want.

What it really is: deliberately manipulating the

truth for personal gain.

Others see you as: deceitful, untrustworthy, dangerous.

Gossiping:

What you think it is: bonding with your friends over other people's actions.

What it really is: sharing secrets that are none of your business.

Others see you as: over-dramatic, trouble-making, attention seeking.

Bullying:

What you think it is: pointing out the obvious shortcomings of someone else.

What it really is: hurting someone else to compensate for your own hurt.

Others see you as: mean, threatening, someone to be avoided.

Is this really the impression you want to make on others? Note: As those peers around you grow up, they will believe that all of these mean that you are very insecure. While you want to look superior and impressive, smarter people will think the exact opposite- and they will be correct.



While the emotions behind our words are fleeting, what you say out loud is lasting and cannot be unsaid.



If you have been guilty of any of this, how did you feel afterwards? Why did you say it? Was it to hurt someone else or make yourself feel better? Maybe you had a temporary sense of victory right after you said it, but you probably felt regretful, maybe even embarrassed. Maybe you tried to hastily apologize or explain it, saying, "I didn't mean to hurt you!" "They made me say it to you!" Naivety or ignorance is one justification we give to try to make ourselves feel better after hurting someone. But frantic apologies, misplaced blame, and lame excuses won't be enough to stop you from doing it again.

At the time of writing this, Facebook and social media have only been around for about ten years. Guess what? Comments, status updates and everything you post online are still words that you are responsible for. Many people feel safer when posting online in relative anonymity- just look at the insults, profane

language and childish behavior in comments sections online! It is far worse than anything in the hallways at school. There is no faster way to spread news and gossip than to post it online. While a friend's wound may heal over time, the Internet never forgets.

Social media has a huge audience and can therefore result in very serious consequences. People have been kicked off college sports teams, lost scholarships, lost jobs, lost custody battles, and so much more because of what was carelessly posted on Facebook. Young people have committed suicide because of online bullying, sometimes by people they have never even met! As a Christian, you must rise above the ridiculous lie that some people believe, that their words don't "count" when written online. You are responsible and accountable for everything you say, but also type.

Think about what you say, how you say it, and most importantly, why you are saying it.



Another way our words hurt may be a little less obvious. Do you realize you can actually be hurting yourself through sarcasm, self-deprecation, and self-criticism? If you joke about failing all the time, being fat, or being dumb, well, it may not be long till some of that begins to carry over into how you see yourself. Say, you constantly joke about being fat and then someone says you should lay off the fries...and suddenly you are offended. But you invited these comments yourself- how can you ask others to respect you if you don't respect yourself? The same low self-esteem that causes you to bully someone else makes you an easy target for labels and hurtful words to take over, even when you're the one saying them. Guarding our tongue means ALWAYS guarding our tongue, realizing that EVERYTHING we say has an impact.

Hurtful words are a symptom of a deeper hurt and simply trying to watch your mouth will not take care of the problem. Let's say you have a horrible rash and go to the doctor. He will give you a cream or medicine to help it feel better. But a good doctor will try to figure out what caused the rash. You can use all the cream you want, but if you don't stop playing in the poison oak

patch in your yard, it will never go away. In the same way, you need to look deep inside your heart and find the source of your problem. The words we speak are direct reflections of what is in our hearts. Matthew 12:34 says, "You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of." The only way you can truly change the hurt, anger, and pain in your life is to replace them with Christ. When your heart is full with Him, your thoughts, words and actions are truly led by His Spirit.

Here are some ways you can deal with your anger:

- **Be honest about it:** Talk to someone who can help. A teacher, parents, pastor, counselor- someone who is mature and wise to give you honest, objective advice.
- **Ask God to show you what is really going on in your life.** Does your anger derive from hurt, frustration, or fear? John 8:32 says, "The truth will set you free"...but only if you are truthful.
- **Understand that hurt will happen.** And it will happen again. And again. The only

way those hurts can be healed is through forgiveness. This is the key to dealing with your anger in a healthy, constructive way. Most people believe that you can't forgive someone unless you "feel" like it. That is not true; forgiveness is not a feeling, it is a choice. It is an act of will, an act of obedience.

While the emotion behind the words is fleeting, what was said cannot be unsaid. You may not have truly wished to cause harm with your words, but you can't control how others interpret them. Careless words have ruined businesses, friendships, families, churches, and marriages. No relationship is worth destroying over a hotheaded reaction. It will not make you feel better about yourself and it won't heal the hurt in your heart. Think about what you say, how you say it, and most importantly, why you are saying it.

Forgiveness: Do it for yourself

If you have unresolved anger that is making you say hurtful things, pay careful attention to this next part. If you have been a victim of hurtful things, pay attention to this next

part. The thing is, forgiveness will come into play throughout our lives. Understanding forgiveness and why it is important may be one of the most important lessons you learn in your whole life. Teens and even many adult Christians don't always truly "get" forgiveness. Forgiveness is how you deal with your pain in a healthy and constructive way.

- Forgiveness is not a feeling. It is a decision you make with an act of your will. It has nothing to do with the person who has offended you. It is an emotional release that must happen before there can be healing in your life.
- Forgiveness is an undeserved pardon and an undeserved release. If you think forgiveness is only for those who ask for forgiveness, or deserve your forgiveness, then you don't understand forgiveness at all.
- Forgiveness is not denying, minimizing or excusing what happened. It is being honest and objective about the offense, the pain, and the consequence caused by the offender. Just because you forgive someone does not mean



you have to jump back in the same relationship with them and trust them implicitly. God also gave you a brain...use it.

You cannot control what people do. But you can control what YOU do. You can decide not to allow the actions of another person to control or destroy your life. That's why you need to forgive- so YOU can move forward. Forgiveness is one of God's commandments. Colossians 3:13 says, "Bear with each other and FORGIVE whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as God forgave you." Salvation is based on the forgiveness that came from Jesus' crucifixion. Jesus' death and resurrection removed the penalty of our sin. Our sin drove nails through the feet and hands of God's only Son. Yet God forgave us. We did not deserve His forgiveness, but He gave it anyway. This is the ultimate act of compassion and love. Unforgiveness allows hate and anger to play on repeat; you need to turn it off and move on; don't allow this to keep you from being close to God and living a godly life.

Words Determined By Character:

Being angry or upset is no excuse for letting your words get the better of you. Everyone gets hurt at times, but not everyone takes it out on other people. Your character will determine how you react to anger, hurt, and even hurtful words from others. Matthew 5:39 says, "Do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also." This may sound silly to you and will probably be difficult to remember at times, but it is basically Jesus telling us not to contribute to a bad situation. If you fight back, they will fight even harder and things will escalate. Your impulse will be to return the blow (verbal or physical) to make the other person hurt, like they just hurt you.

Think about this. You may feel like you are defending yourself by returning an insult, but in actuality you are using the same bullying mentality that they are. It sounds pretty childish, doesn't it? No one wins. If you really want to frustrate the other person, don't respond to them. Bullies want attention and can't stand when they don't get what they



"A WISE MAN ONCE SAID... NOTHING."

-Anonymous



want. They will probably try even harder to provoke you into a response; soon enough, they will become desperate and pathetic. Don't stoop to their level.

The stronger sense you have of who YOU are, the easier you will be able to resist being baited into careless words. Your character plays a huge role in this. People with strong character can recognize when others are trying to steer them away from doing what is right and not feel as pressured by them. A desire to be compassionate and respectful will keep them from saying things they don't mean.

Some people age, but others mature. When you age, you develop gray hair and wrinkles. When you mature, you develop character. There are adults in this world who behave like they are still in high school, but there are thirteen-year-old students who excel in college classes. Character is made up of the following qualities:

- Honesty with others
- Courage to do what is right
- Respect for your others, as well as yourself
- Responsibility for your actions
- Endurance to keep going amidst hardship
- Ability to live up to your potential
- Compassion for others
- Integrity by sticking to morals and beliefs
- Acceptance of others, leaving the judgment to God

• Confidence in who you are
Have you ever said anything mean because you weren't strong enough in any of these areas? On the other hand, have any of these qualities kept you from saying the wrong thing? If so, congratulations! Keeping your tongue in check is a huge sign of maturity and is something that will benefit you greatly in the future.

Encouraging Words

Not all words are horrible and damaging, but they can sure be explosive. Now you may understand why some monks and priests take vows of silence! There is a lot of power in silence. A great anonymous quote is: "A wise man once said...nothing." If you picture a "wise" man in a movie, he is usually calm, old, and pretty quiet. Sometimes it wouldn't hurt to follow his lead. It is an immature response to fight fire with fire. That's what fire wants and as it grows, it becomes more destructive. If you can fight the fire with, say, water, the fire will get frustrated and angry but eventually it will die. Something as simple as pausing to take a deep breath before you respond could be the difference between creating peace or contributing to chaos. "Whoever keeps his mouth and his tongue keeps himself out of trouble" in Proverbs 21:23. If you have any hesitation before talking, just don't say it! Take great care when you open your mouth to speak and when you do, make sure your purpose is benefitting to a situation.

Give your heart and your life to God and you will be filled with His empowering spirit, which will come out in all your thoughts, actions, and words.



Remember: Hurtful words only happen when the source is angry and without God. Have you heard the phrase in superhero movies, "With great power comes great responsibility"? Words are powerful, but you can do great things with them. You can influence someone's day or even life with encouraging words. Ephesians 4:29 says, "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen." You can use your words to do truly amazing things. Even taking the time to say "please" and "thank you" reminds someone that you treat them with respect. If you see someone struggling, verbal affirmation can motivate him to persist and continue. If you use your words to help someone be successful, you are then a part of that success- how cool is that! God wants

us to support and love each other.

As mentioned previously, a bridled horse is still a very powerful and strong animal, but it needs a great master. Your relationship with Christ is at the heart of all you do. If it seems you have no control over what you say, maybe you are simply a person that has never been saved. Even if you grew up in church with Christian parents and know all sorts of Bible verses, you may not have a personal relationship with God. He wants this so badly. Take a chance and trust Him with your hurt; open the door and let Him into your life so you will not face your struggles and anger alone. Give your heart and your life to God and you will be filled with His empowering spirit, which will come out in all your thoughts, actions, and words.

Questions and Scripture:

1. Read I Peter 3:10. When was the last time you lied? How did it make you feel? What were the consequences?
2. When did you last gossip about someone? Did it spread? Did it get back to the person it was about? Why did you do it?
3. Read James 4:11-12 and Matthew 7:3. Pointing out others' flaws makes you feel better and you falsely believe your sin isn't so bad. Have you ever noticed yourself judging others? Why is this wrong? How have you felt judged by people?
4. Check out Proverbs 18:21 – what does "fruit" mean here to you?
5. What hurt do you have in your life right now? Has it ever caused you to react in a way you later regret? Now go check out Ephesians 4:31-32.
6. Memorize Psalm 141:3. Next time you're upset, challenge yourself to stop and take a deep breath before you speak. Do you really need to say anything after all?

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