

SERMON TITLE: Getting to the Heart of Your Words

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SCRIPTURE: Matthew 12:34-37

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Not a day goes by that we aren't shaped by words—words spoken to us, words on the news, words on social media, our own words. We're shaped by words because there is a mysterious and yet certain power in them. The Bible says that there is life and death in the power of the tongue. Words are used to build up and give life. Or, sometimes, they're used to tear down and take life. So, how can we be sure that we are speaking life to others? How can we avoid words that cut and tear down? How can we know we are honoring God with what comes out of our mouths? Answer: God himself is not silent. He is the God who speaks. In Scripture and ultimately in Jesus, we have God's holy communication to us. His word should be the primary thing that shapes our words so that others might find life in him.

This is our second week in our new summer series entitled "The Words We Use." I don't know about you, but already, I am becoming more aware of what I say and how I say it. To be honest, this past week, I didn't do much better than the week before, especially with the whole traffic issue I mentioned earlier. So, the bad thing about this past week was that it seemed like I experienced more traffic-related temptation to give other drivers a good tongue-lashing in the privacy of my own vehicle. But, the good thing about this past week was I became much more aware of my words. There's a saying that I heard years ago that makes that make sense—"Whatever you focus on expands." It's a principle that applies to just about everything. Like, the more you focus on your health, the more you think about the food you're eating, exercise, how much water you drink. The more you focus on a certain kind of car—*like*—you're thinking about buying a Jeep Wrangler—*which is a great choice, by the way*—but the more you think about buying a Jeep, the more Jeeps you see everywhere you go. The more you focus on your favorite college team—the more you feel invested in that team and the more emotional you become if they lose. If you focus on positive things, the more positive things you see, but if you focus on the negative, you'll find negatives everywhere. Whatever you focus on expands. And by taking the summer to focus on the words we use, hopefully, we will begin to take our words as seriously as God takes them.

Tips for focusing more attention on your words: (1) Don't miss a single message in this series! Remember, the messages can be found online, on our website, and on our FG app; (2) read Jeff Robinson's excellent book, "Taming the Tongue: How the Gospel Transforms Our Talk;" (3) read through the book of Proverbs with us in our CBR reading plan, and highlight every proverb that talks about what we say and how we say it (pick up a reading schedule card out at the Next Steps table or Welcome Center out in the Commons); and (4) memorize the memory verses we give you. If you take this journey with us, you'll begin to take your words much more seriously. And, you'll begin to see why taming the tongue is so hard. In fact, Jesus tells us why in Matthew 12:34-35.

Jesus is in a hot debate with the Jewish religious leaders who have rejected him and his message. In fact, they're saying that the things Jesus is saying and doing come from the devil, which Jesus calls "blaspheming the Holy Spirit." They claim that they're the ones who define and teach what's truly good. They say, "Our teaching is from God, but you're in league with Satan" ...*So Jesus says...*

READ 12:34-35 — The first thing we learn from Jesus is this: (1) Jesus says our words reveal the condition of our hearts. He says our words flow out of the "abundance" of our hearts. So, there's a much bigger issue than just the words we say; the bigger issue is what's going on in our hearts. The heart is the root of our words. Our words make visible/audible what is invisible/hidden away in our hearts. Whatever is in your heart will come out of your mouth. Whatever is in your heart toward another person—anger, envy, jealousy, a desire for acceptance—will shape the words you speak to that person. It is impossible for us to keep what we think, feel, and desire from affecting our words. The point is: Any progress in taming the tongue only comes by dealing with what's going on in your heart. Paul Tripp puts it this way (*my paraphrase*): "People aren't my problem. Situations aren't my problem. Circumstances are not my problem. Locations are not my problem. My problem is in my heart. It's only when you and I stand before our Redeemer and we're humbly willing to say—*regardless of the flawed people you live with and the fallen world you live in*—'Lord, I am the problem—I am my greatest communication problem.' Only when you admit to that will you begin to head in a direction of fundamental biblical change in your world of talk." (Jesus says essentially the same thing in Matt 15:10-19 and Lk 6:45.)

Read 12:36-37 — (2) Jesus says, one day, we will give an account to God for our careless words. I hear you; you're thinking, "What? Wait! I thought we are justified by faith and not by our works or by our words." "Didn't Jesus say, 'If you

believe in me you will not come under judgment, but you pass from death to life?" (cf Jn 5:24). So, what gives?" Well, it depends on what you mean by judged. Christians will not be judged according to our sins (cf Rom 8:1). We are eternally secure because we have been saved/justified by faith in Christ. So, if you've trusted Christ for salvation, you can rest in the fact that Jesus was judged in your place. However, the same apostle Paul tells us in 1 Cor 3:12-15 that Christians will be evaluated/held accountable for the life we build on the foundation of our faith in Christ. This is a judgment for rewards, not eternal life. One more time: Christians will not be judged for their sins; however, we will be evaluated and held accountable for what we did with what God has given us, and according to Jesus, that includes the words we say every single day. Jeff Robinson writes, "Jesus takes our words seriously because bitter words flow from a bitter heart—discontented words flow from a discontented heart—critical words flow from a critical heart—flattering words flow from a deceitful heart—lying words flow from a dishonest heart—condemning words flow from a heart where the love of Jesus seems to not have taken up residence." Whatever rules your heart shapes your words and for that reason, we will give an account for the lifetime trajectory of our words. *Mark it down:* Word problems are heart problems. You and I always speak out of what's already in our hearts, and that's why Jesus takes our words so seriously.

The Tongue Assignment — (explained in the message) — For the next week, try to live by these five laws for taming the tongue—there's a negative and a positive side to each one.

1. Do not gossip (do not say anything negative about anyone, do not "confess their sins," do not mention your frustrations or irritations about anyone... anyone!). Rather, do speak well of others.
2. Do not complain about anything, but do give thanks in all things.
3. Do not blame-shift or make excuses (at all, for anything), but do own your mistakes and confess your sins (outward sin and at the motive, heart level).
4. Do not defend yourself, but do acknowledge where the critique is accurate.
5. Do not boast about anything in yourself, but do boast in your weakness and need.



The point of the assignment is that until you come to grips with how hard it is to tame the tongue, you won't realize what's really going on in your heart. And that means you don't know who you really are in Christ. Your tongue—the words you use—reveal who you are. So, until you take what you say as seriously as God takes your words, you won't know what's going on in your heart. And, if you don't know the condition of your heart, you won't know who you really are. And, if you are not aware of the condition of your heart, you will end up living a self-deceived life.

So where does all this leave us? Well, first of all, these words of Jesus are not meant to discourage us or to make us feel hopeless or weigh us down under a pile of guilt. No, Jesus uses these strong words to wake us up and motivate us to take what we say as seriously as God does. He uses strong words about our words so that we realize that our words are the window to seeing what's going on in our hearts. The key is this: Give God first place in your heart, because when God rules over your heart, he will rule over your tongue. When God rules in your heart, your words will change without you even thinking about it.

Discussion Starters —

1. Last week we saw how seriously God takes our words from the apostle James (James 3:1-2). This week, we see how seriously Jesus takes our words. READ Matthew 12:34-35.
2. Does anyone have any stories about how the Holy Spirit prompted them to pay more attention to the words coming out of your mouth?
3. How is it that our words reveal the condition of our hearts?
4. Read vv 36-37. What does Jesus say about how, on the Final Day, we will be held accountable for “every careless word?”
5. What are “careless” words? What kinds of situations most often prompt careless words?
6. How does being “justified by our words” square with what Paul teaches us in Romans and Galatians about our being justified by faith alone in Christ alone?
7. What is your biggest “aha” and/or “take-away” from this passage and this message?
8. How might your group help each other when it comes to taking our words more seriously? Consider doing the “Tongue Assignment” together and reporting back next week on how you did with the assignment.