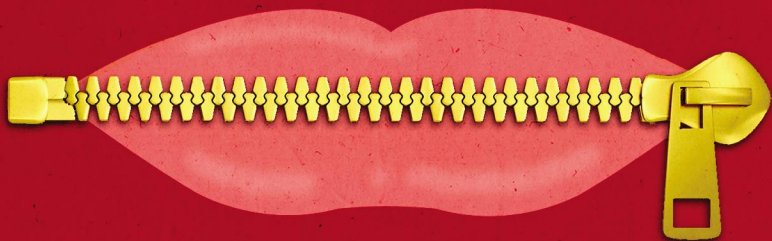


ZIP IT



THE KEEP IT SHUT
40-DAY CHALLENGE

KAREN EHMAN

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

Our words are a powerful weapon—for good or for evil. To wield our weapons properly, we need to allow God to steer our speech, aligning our words with his will. Karen Ehman has given us an important tool in this quest. *Zip It* takes us on a 40-day devotional journey through the Bible, giving us biblical direction, questions for reflection, and a daily challenge to ponder as we discover what to say, God's way of saying it, and when we'd better just shut our mouths.

DR. TONY EVANS, senior pastor, Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship, Dallas; founder, The Urban Alternative; former chaplain, Dallas Cowboys; chaplain, Dallas Mavericks; author, *Watch Your Mouth: Understanding the Power of the Tongue*

This 40-day challenge is just what I need to help me refocus and think through the words I say daily. Karen Ehman's biblical wisdom, mixed with practical insight and everyday applications, helps me see that I can do better. If I follow God's Word and think before I speak, I can learn to zip it and so can you! This is a must-read for all of us.

COURTNEY JOSEPH, author and blogger, WomenLivingWell.org and GoodMorningGirls.org

Karen Ehman combines biblical depth and relational breadth, then wraps it all in practical application, making *Zip It* the complete package! In it, Karen has identified all the nuances of our speech, especially those with potential to harm, calling us out in the very kindest way, and offering hope for our wayward tongues. The right word in the right manner at the right moment has the power to transform lives. I'm so grateful to Karen for inviting us to a place of loveliness and grace with our words in a world that so desperately needs both.

GLYNNIS WHITWER, Executive Director of Communications, Proverbs 31 Ministries; Senior Editor, *Encouragement for Today* online devotions; editor, *The NIV Real-Life Devotional Bible for Women*

A great follow-up to her book *Keep It Shut*, this practical and engaging devotional will convict and encourage you! We all need to tame the tongue, don't we? This practical help is exactly what we need to get us there!

SHAUNTI FELDHAHN, social researcher and bestselling author, *For Women Only*

Karen has done it again! In her coffee-shop-chat style, Karen's latest devotional encourages us to use our words wisely. With her perfect blend of teaching and transparency, Karen leads with wisdom and wit. I felt convicted but hopeful that this is a change that is biblical *and* possible!

WHITNEY CAPPS, national speaker for Proverbs 31 Ministries and writer for their First 5 app

Few people use words wisely. Those who do are like a "rare jewel," as the Scriptures say (Proverbs 20:15). Short, insightful, and aimed at the heart, Karen Ehman's brand new devotional, *Zip It*, offers hope to those of us who want to be that "rare jewel." Powerful!

PATRICK AND RUTH SCHWENK, founders of TheBetterMom.com and ForTheFamily.org; coauthors, *For Better or For Kids*

In *Zip It*, Karen Ehman gives us a hard but needed 40-day challenge to practice using our tongue to heal and give life instead of as a weapon that hurts and kills. Her use of Scripture coupled with personal examples help us learn to use our words for the honor of God and the good of our neighbor. This is a much-needed challenge!

JENNIFER THORN, pastor's wife and blogger, jenthorn.com

I love *Zip It* because it provides practical and creative tools to help us weigh our words and align them with God's truth. Each day

Karen equips us with takeaways, lessons, and prayers to ensure the words we speak not only please the Lord but also bless and encourage others. I especially love her challenge to create a “word-robe” (a word wardrobe) within our hearts and fill it with biblical truths and promises tailored to meet our needs and circumstances.

WENDY BLIGHT, Proverbs 31 Ministries First
5 Writing Team; author, *I Know His Name:
Discovering Power in the Name of God*

With great application, personal insight, and humor, Karen Ehman dives into an area each one of us struggles with—our words! She has a way of taking touchy subjects, giving them a fresh perspective, and pointing us to grace-covered truth. What a perfect book at any age and stage of life!

CLARE SMITH, blogger, speaker, personal
coach, and trainer, ClareSmith.me

Our words are directly tied to the condition of our relationship with Jesus. The 40-challenge of *Zip It* arrives at a great time in the history of the world. Social media, circles of friendships, and family relationships are built and destroyed with the power of our words. *Zip It* is a great book that will help you have victory of your mouth! Take the challenge!

CHRISSE DUNHAM, Global Director of Women’s
Ministry, Prestonwood Baptist Church

Our words hold the power to make someone feel like a king or a pauper. This book will help you with “mouth management” so the ones closest to you will feel like royalty. Karen Ehman is a trusted guide who will teach you when to zip it and when to speak up.

ARLENE PELLICANE, Proverbs 31 Ministries writer and
speaker; author, *31 Days to Becoming a Happy Mom*

Our words just may be the single most important key to successful relationships. This book is a gem and it reminds us of that. It's practical, easy-to-read, and just what is needed to enable us to use our words in a way that brings life to those around us. Thank you, Karen, for such a powerful book wives and husbands both can use!

JILL SAVAGE, founder, Hearts at Home; coauthor with husband Mark Savage, *No More Perfect Marriages*

Karen Ehman teaches God's truth in an authentic, practical, humorous, yet very relational way. In her new book, *Zip It*, Karen guides us through Scriptures concerning the tongue, while also providing application-oriented takeaways and helpful lessons for our lips. Not only did *Zip It* inspire me to choose my words more carefully and prayerfully—especially when Facebook makes me feisty—but I also can't wait to read it with my two tween daughters. This devotion will be a “go-to” for many years to come. Highly recommend!

CINDY BULTEMA, Bible teacher, speaker; and author, *Red Hot Faith* and *Live Full, Walk Free: Set Apart in a Sin-Soaked World*

Keeping my mouth shut is a daily struggle—whether it's talking too much when I need to listen, partaking in the watercooler gossip when I should walk away, writing my opinion on social media when it's not needed, or the hundreds of other reasons. While doing the *Keep It Shut* study I became more aware of my mouth and its actions. I am so excited for this devotional and the daily reminders of how to keep it shut! I have a feeling I will start it over every 40 days!

MANDY YOUNG, speaker and blogger at MandyYoung.com

Thank you, Karen Ehman, for writing this book! *Zip It* landed in my lap when I absolutely needed to read it. Let me confess, as a woman who speaks far faster than she thinks; this 40-day challenge was a Godsend! With all the different relationships I juggle, I've witnessed far too many times how my words speak life or death. I'm so grateful for the truth and transformation found in these pages . . . and so are those closest to me!

MARIAN JORDAN ELLIS, author and
founder, Redeemed Girl Ministries

Imagine what the world would look like if we only used words to build, bless, encourage, and praise? That is the world Karen offers us through her compelling and life-giving challenge to zip it. This book is a much-needed 40-day diet for the soul—leaving you with new and life changing habits on how to use your words!

TRACY WILDE, speaker and author,
Finding the Lost Art of Empathy

Also by Karen Ehman

*Keep It Shut: What to Say, How to Say
It, and When to Say Nothing at All*

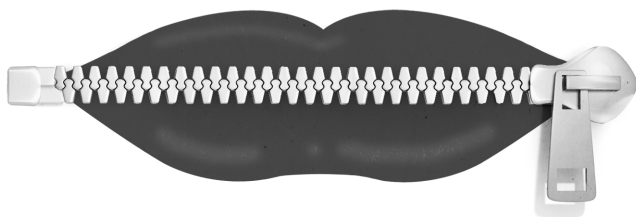
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& and Why We All Need to Knock It Off*

*Pressing Pause: 100 Quiet Moments
for Moms to Meet with Jesus*

*Let. It. Go.: How to Stop Running the
Show and Start Walking in Faith*

*Listen, Love, Repeat: Other-Centered
Living in a Self-Centered World*

ZIP IT



THE KEEP IT SHUT
40-DAY CHALLENGE

KAREN EHMAN

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Zip It

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*To my father
Howltan Wayne “Pat” Patterson
You passed on to me your gift of gab but
also your habit of daily reading God’s Word.
My love for you is beyond measure.*

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INTRODUCTION



Words. Each day we use thousands of them in dozens of places. We utter them to our family members. We speak them at work. We strike up a conversation with a complete stranger or reply to our nosy neighbor. We ask a question of our child's teacher or patiently answer a toddler's question for the fifth time. And in addition to the words that roll off our lips, we have the ones we type with our fingertips—in the text, blog comment, or social media reply.

One thing is certain when it comes to our words: they are powerful and they have consequences. They can encourage or embitter, bless or badger, build up or break down. The tongue has the power of life and death (Prov. 18:21). Many times my words have been less than lovely, bringing about guilt and causing regret or even ushering in the death of a relationship. In fact, as I surveyed my life a few years ago, I observed that I could tether almost every tense or fractured relationship I'd had back to something I'd said. As God began to deal with me about the way I used my words, I learned to apply the vast advice the Bible has for us about how we should—and should not—speak. This led to my writing the book *Keep It Shut: What to Say, How to Say It, and When to Say Nothing at All*.

Since writing *Keep It Shut*, I have heard from countless

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people about their own struggles with their words. Rarely a week goes by that I don't get an email or comment on social media from someone who has read the book and is trying to go down a new path, using their words for good and for God. But I am also often asked if I would consider writing more on the subject, providing some practical ways to implement the Bible's advice when it comes to how we speak to those in our lives.

The result of these requests is the book you now hold in your hands. It is my prayer that you will use it as a tool to dive deep into Scripture, discovering its relevant advice that can enable your interactions with others and your relationships to be at their very best.

The book is arranged in eight chapters on various themes that relate to our words, such as anger, when to be silent, when to speak up, and how to make our words both salty and sweet. The five entries within each chapter are designed for you to use Monday through Friday over an eight-week period.

The forty short entries each provide a challenge Scripture for the day and a story or example that helps to punctuate its theme. The "Today's Takeaways" section presents one or more bullet point nuggets to ponder for the day. The "Lesson for the Lips" feature gives practical challenges and doable activities to empower you to effectively live out the truths of Scripture. Each entry also concludes with a focused prayer.

Please know I will be continuing alongside you in this lifelong quest to temper our tongues, cheering you on all along the way. My prayer is that both of us will purpose to make our thoughts align with Scripture so when they turn

INTRODUCTION

into words they are pleasing to God and a gift to those who are listening.

Are you ready? Then turn to Day 1 as together we discover what we should say, how best to say it, and when we might better just zip it!

In Christ,

Karen

WEEK ONE



The Power of Our Words

1

A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH



Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those
who love it will eat its fruits. (Prov. 18:21 ESV)

I have learned something in my decades of relationships on this earth: words are powerful, and they have consequences.

Words have always set events into motion. Often what we have read about in our history books or experienced in our own lives came about because of someone's speech. Combative words have sparked wars, bringing about death and destruction. Soothing words have calmed souls, quieted hearts, and prevented potentially volatile situations from escalating and producing dire consequences. Encouraging words have imparted bravery and empowered doubting souls to accomplish what they never dreamed they could. Loving words have birthed relationships and bonded soul mates.

Can you think back on your own life and find evidence

of the power and lasting impact of words someone said either to or about you? I know I can. These phrases echo in the chambers of my mind and recall for me either pain and sorrow or love and inspiration.

When a neighborhood mom told my mother I was a “bossy child” who “acts like the mother hen of the subdivision,” it hurt my heart. It made me think from an early age that my large-and-in-charge personality was a detriment and that no one really liked me; they were just tolerating me. So I longed instead to be a quiet-as-a-mouse little girl like Patti, a girl who lived behind me. But try as I might, I couldn’t be meek and mild, let alone quiet.

When I was in college, a campus instructor made a comment to my face about my weight. (At that time I was about ten pounds over my doctor’s recommended weight for my height and age.) I allowed her words to cling to my consciousness. And I wrongly surmised that any rejection I ever felt was because of my weight. If a guy dumped me, it was because I was fat. If I didn’t get invited to an afternoon of shopping at the mall with girls in my dorm, it was because they didn’t want to be seen with a heavy girl. Sometimes I even combined both of the hurtful phrases from my past, attributing rejection to the notion that I must be one bossy, obese gal!

But thankfully—although a little less often—words have been spoken to or about me that have lifted my spirits and from which I could draw strength, sometimes even decades later!

My seventh-grade English teacher wrote on one of my progress reports, “Karen is an excellent writer—especially

A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH

with poetry.” Later one of my college professors told a colleague how much I would be missed when I graduated because I took my jobs as a resident assistant, sports editor of the school paper, and director of the campus’s social life activities very seriously. Yet another voice from my past echoes still to this day. As I discussed my uncertain future with a church staff member I knew in high school one day, she told me, “You will go far. I believe in you.”

Yes, words are powerful and they have consequences. The consequences may be stellar—or sorrowful. They may be amazing—or awful. They may make an impact on lives for the better—or affect souls for the worse. Proverbs goes so far as to assert that “Death and life are in the power of the tongue” (18:21 ESV).

As we begin this 40-day journey together, we have a choice. We can use our speech—both spoken and written—for good or for evil. Our words can bring life-giving refreshment or deal a deathblow. Words can be warmth or a weapon. How we wield them will affect not only our relationships with others but our relationship with God.

Let’s vow to learn all we can in these forty days to align our words with God’s holy Word. Are you ready to begin? Your speech can help to change someone’s world for the better, writing a story of love and peace.

Today’s Takeaways

- *Words are like superglue.* Remember the old childhood chorus “Sticks and stones may break my

bones, but words can never hurt me”? What a lie! We may have felt a tad better responding to our playground enemies with this chant, but we knew better. The truth is that bruises fade and bones eventually heal, but a scorched heart may take years to heal. Words stick. And not just sorta stick, like the creamy white school glue we used in third grade. They are more like superglue, nearly permanent and painful to peel off. This week, think about the truth that words stick. Before you lash out at someone in anger or leak a little sarcasm from your lips, remind yourself that your words have not only power for good or evil, they also have staying power.

- *We have a choice. Choose wisely.* Be choosey. Don't let words tumble off your tongue haphazardly or flippantly. Select your speech shrewdly. Craft your emails, texts, and social media posts and comments with care. A moment of cautious thought now can save boatloads of misunderstanding and pain later. Be conscientious, not careless. Impart life; don't dole out death.

Lesson for the Lips

Think back over your life. Does a phrase either spoken directly to you or said about you still echo in your mind today? Perhaps it was encouraging and brought life. Or maybe it was critical, caustic, or cutting and has stuck with you over

A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH

the years, leaving an ache in your heart or pain in your soul. What words have stuck with you over the years? How does thinking about their lasting impact shape your perspective on how you use your own words with others today?

Prayer

Father, your Word tells us words are powerful and they have consequences. Make this truth stay close to me this week as I use my words to interact with others. I want to speak life into my relationships and not utter words that bring about death. May my speech glorify you today. In Jesus's name, amen.

2

THE GREAT KNOW-IT-ALL



Before a word is on my tongue you, LORD,
know it completely. (Ps. 139:4)

For the first decade of my marriage, I was involved in working with teenagers. My husband was a youth pastor and I was a volunteer in the junior and senior high youth program at church. This work included lots of Bible teaching and teen counseling but also the weekly duties of snack making and game organizing. One of the kids' favorite games was a little show my husband and I put on. I refer to it as "The Great Know-It-All."

In this little amusement, my husband would leave the room for a few minutes while I chose one of the teens to play the game. That teenager would select an object in the room to be "it." It might be the clock on the wall, a book on the shelf, one of the girls' purses, or a can of soda pop on the snack table. Then my husband would rejoin us. I would go around the room pointing at various objects, asking him, "Is

THE GREAT KNOW-IT-ALL

this it? How about this? Is this it?” Every time, without fail, my husband was able to correctly guess which item the teenager had chosen.

This little shenanigan completely dumbfounded the kids. No matter how many times we did it, they never could figure out how my husband knew which item had been selected. (Hint: It had to do with what item I pointed to *before* pointing to the one selected and not at all with the one they’d chosen. And no, I will not divulge the secret of “The Great Know-It-All!”)

Psalm 139 paints a breathtaking portrait of how intimately God knows us. Long ago he saw us as we were being formed in our mothers’ wombs (vv. 13–16). And today he is acquainted with our daily activities, knowing when we sit down or stand up (v. 2). Why, God knows what we’re going to say long before we even say it! Verse 4 boldly states, “Before a word is on my tongue you, LORD, know it completely.” I observe two astonishing things tucked inside this verse.

First, God knows our words long before they ever leave our lips, before they are even on our tongues. This means he also knows the thoughts we are mulling in our minds. In fact, in Psalm 139:2, we are told God understands our thoughts even from far away. Before words are uttered audibly, they first originate in our minds. Thoughts turn into words.

Second, this verse shows us God not only knows the words we are about to speak, but that he knows them *completely*. He doesn’t merely have an inkling of what we might say, but rather he thoroughly and completely knows what words have formed in our minds and are about to leak out of our mouths.

What a sobering verse to ponder! God really is the Great Know-It-All. He knows what we are thinking. He knows what we are about to say. He understands and ascertains us completely. No one is more intimately acquainted with our communications.

Today's Takeaways

- *Know your nakedness.* The truth of Psalm 139:4 should startle us a bit. Often—before our thoughts have formed into words and actually proceeded from our mouths—we think we can hide what we've been thinking. All the times I thought something unkind and longed to say it, but held back, I thought I had scored a major victory. But guess what! God still knows those thoughts. All our ways are laid bare before him. We can't hide. Our minds are naked before him. This should cause us to try to rein in our thoughts and keep them in line with God's Word. We may be able to hide from others, but we cannot hide from God.
- *Ponder what is pure.* Philippians 4:8 reads, "Brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things." God sure stresses the importance of our thought life. We are to ponder what is pure rather than let our thoughts

THE GREAT KNOW-IT-ALL

paddle around in pollution. The best way to think of what is right, pure, lovely, and admirable is to meditate on Scripture. When our thoughts are in alignment with God's Word, our speech has a better chance at being uplifting, wholesome, and godly.

Lesson for the Lips

Today, let's not focus on our words so much but rather on our thought life. How would you rate your thinking on the following scale?

- 1—I often have less-than-lovely thoughts about others and even plot to do evil.
- 2—I occasionally have less-than-lovely thoughts about others and only sometimes plan to do wrong.
- 3—My thought life is a pretty even mix of good and evil.
- 4—Most of the time my thoughts are uplifting and godly and only occasionally do I struggle with keeping them in line.
- 5—I really don't have trouble keeping my thoughts in alignment with Scripture.

Now, to help keep your thought life in order, choose one of the verses mentioned here and try to memorize it this week. Write it on a sticky note and post it in a prominent place where you will see it often. Or type it out on your cell phone and make it your lock screen. Continue mentally rehearsing it, and even saying it out loud, until you memorize

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it. Then, in the future, when your thoughts want to migrate to a place where they will not be pleasing to God, quote the verse out loud.

- Psalm 139:4: “Before a word is on my tongue you, LORD, know it completely.”
- Philippians 4:8: “Brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”

Prayer

Heavenly Father, I know I cannot hide from you. I cannot hide my words nor even my thoughts. May I be mindful today to bring both my words and my thoughts into line with your Word so they will be pleasing in your sight. In Jesus's name, amen.

3

SHUTTING DOWN THE MOTORMOUTH



When there are many words, transgression and offense are unavoidable. But he who controls his lips and keeps thoughtful silence is wise. (Prov. 10:19 AMP)

I had never heard the sound before. The loud rumbling seemed to shake the house. It was coming from the basement and I couldn't quite put my finger on what it was. All I knew was that it sounded dangerous. I was tucked cozily in my home office writing, so I put down my coffee mug and ventured downstairs to investigate. However, by the time I reached the basement, the rumbling had stopped. The mystery remained.

A few days later I was in our kitchen. Again the rumblings started. Just as before, I dashed to the basement to try to figure out where the monstrous mechanical noise was coming

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from. But just like before, the rumbling ceased before I made it to our lower level.

Later that day, I alerted my husband to what had been going on. We weren't sure if it was the furnace, the sump pump, or some other motorized contraption making the reverberating boom. We decided to sit tight and wait for it to happen again.

A few days later, early on a Sunday morning, my husband rose after hitting the "Off" button on his alarm and began to walk down the hallway. He stopped in his tracks when he heard a low but constant humming sound. It was not the loud, shaking boom I had experienced, but nevertheless he dashed to the basement to investigate. There he discovered our septic tank injector was running constantly, its motor clearly approaching burnout.

A quick search on the Internet showed him this was nothing to fool with. We needed to get it repaired immediately. But before we could do that, we needed to shut off the motor, which was now making an even louder, higher pitched hum. He shut off the motor and put a sign on the lower-level bathroom telling our family members not to use it.

Yes, if the motor hadn't been shut down, the consequences could have been extremely messy. Septic and sewer issues must be addressed. If left unattended, they can cause a major stink—literally!

Proverbs 10:19 teaches this is true not only in the plumbing world, but with our mouths as well. As the Amplified Bible version says, "When there are many words, transgression and

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offense are unavoidable. But he who controls his lips and keeps thoughtful silence is wise.”

Have you ever let your constant stream of words get you into trouble? I sure have—more than once. When we constantly run our motormouths, we create a situation with a greater chance of saying something that offends or that we’ll later regret. It is nearly unavoidable, as Proverbs 10:19 clearly states. The solution? It’s found in the latter half of the verse—we must seek to control our tongues and instead employ the tool of thoughtful silence. Thoughtful silence doesn’t mean we never speak; it means we need to zip our lips to avoid uttering something we will later wish we could take back. It means we give careful and prayerful thought to the words we might speak, using discernment to decide if we should speak at all!

Today, let’s not just watch what *kind* of words roll off our lips; let’s also prudently monitor *how many*. Constantly running motors—whether machine or mouth—are prone to malfunction, thereby causing a mighty mess.

Today’s Takeaways

- *Too many words can lead to much heartache.* It’s a matter of simple mathematics: the more words we speak, the more opportunities we have to slip up and offend someone—even if the offense is unintentional. An overabundance of rhetoric is often a setup for sin. By intentionally paring back

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the *quantity* of our words, we can make sure they are *quality* words—true, kind, and necessary.

- *Silence speaks.* Don't underestimate the ability of silence to speak volumes. When we refuse to jump into a conversation full of criticism, gossip, or idle talk, our silence speaks. It attests to our character and indicates to others that we will not be pulled into pettiness. Give your lips a rest and seek to perfect the art of wise and thoughtful silence as advised in today's verse.

Lesson for the Lips

Let's talk quantity. Circle the phrase below that most closely describes you when it comes to how often you talk in social situations or interactions in your relationships:

- I am relatively quiet most of the time, usually speaking less than others in a group setting and rarely voicing my opinion.
- I am quiet sometimes, especially with people I don't know, but other times I talk a great deal in a group setting and offer my opinion when directly asked.
- I talk about as much as the average person, giving my opinions without dominating conversations.
- I am considered by most to be a chatterbox, talking

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more than others in almost every social situation and freely giving my opinion.

Based on the description you circled, would you like to make any changes? Do you need to make an adjustment in how often you speak? If so, what? Write out a sentence or two with your goal in this area.

Prayer

Father, your Word tells me that where there is a great deal of talk, there is great potential for offending someone and even sinning. May I carefully monitor the number of words I speak today, making sure that my words are true, kind, and necessary at the moment. Muzzle me when I need to remain silent. May my words glorify you and encourage others. In Jesus's name, amen.

4

ON CHERRY SLUSHIES AND REFRESHING SPRINGS



No human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. 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. (James 3:8–12)

My youngest son is a high school football player whose team just won the state championship—for the fifth time in six years. GO YELLOW JACKETS! (Total mom brag moment there.) In addition to lots of excitement for this football family, our past few late summer and fall seasons were filled with

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two-a-day practices, early morning weight-lifting sessions, lots of grimy uniforms, and a larger-than-normal grocery bill. Also, as part of my son's and his friends' normal routine, our vehicle made many stops at the local convenience store after practice in the beating sun. There they would grab a slushy iced drink before heading home to shower and crash.

When my son and his friends trek into the store, grab a cup, and place it under a spout on the slushy machine, they have no doubt what will come out of the spigot. If they place it under the spout marked "cherry" and pull, the frosty stream pouring out will indeed be the flavor of that sweet, red fruit. If instead they pull the lever marked "cola," they will receive cola flavor. They needn't worry that a flavor other than what is labeled will come coursing out. (A few of his friends, however, do switch their cups from spout to spout, making a mix of cola, cherry, grape, and lemon-lime. They call this original concoction "Swamp Water"!)

Perhaps we can learn a little lesson from the slushy machine. Each spigot on the device gushes out one type of drink. Our mouths as well should also flow out only one type of speech—namely, that which is refreshing. Today's passage, James 3:8–12, warns, "Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be" (v. 10). And the passage starts out with a bold statement: "No human being can tame the tongue." It is restless—even deadly. While the tongue can't be tamed completely, we can seek to temper it.

We may do many good things with our mouths—

encourage the weary, embolden the timid, calm the fretful, or soothe the hurting. We even use our words to praise our heavenly Father. And then at times we turn right around and curse our fellow human beings, who have been made in the image of God. The Bible issues a strong warning against such double-minded speech. Not only should we attempt to correct such conduct because of the warning in Scripture, but we should do it for another reason—because others are watching our behavior.

As Christians, we represent Christ. To represent means to “re-present” him to others. What kind of representation are we if we don’t sound at all like the One we are supposed to be “re-presenting”? When our mouths flow forth both praising and cursing, we are not imitating Christ. When we curse our fellow human beings—people who are image bearers of God—we are not advancing the kingdom and pointing others to the gospel message.

Now, before we let ourselves off the hook on this one, we must realize that the type of cursing mentioned here in this passage is not the foul-mouthed, cuss-word slinging type of cursing we often think about. “Curse” in this passage means “to put down or condemn.” Certainly this type of speech slips easily into our conversation—sometimes more easily than a cuss word!

So today try to avoid condemnation and put-downs. Watch for double-minded dialogue and speech. Such a mixture is truly like swamp water! Instead, may we strive to utter only praiseworthy words.

Today's Takeaways

- *The tongue cannot be tamed.* This fact is not an excuse for us to chuck any notion of working on our words, nor does it mean we can escape the consequences of bad speech or pay no attention to how we use our language when interacting with others. It means we will never achieve perfection in our speech. We can, however, strive to improve our verbal interactions, which will in turn improve our relationships.
- *When we open our mouths, let's think praise—not put-downs.* Our speech should praise God. Not only is it an honor and a privilege to praise our heavenly Father, but praise should arise naturally as an overflow of a thankful heart. However, in addition to praising God, let's seek to also praise our fellow human beings rather than put them down. May our praise be pure, flowing from hearts that love the image bearers in our lives—both in our families and beyond.

Lesson for the Lips

Let's take the "Praise Over Put-Downs" challenge. In your interactions with others today—whether at home, work, or in your community—seek to utter words of praise and refrain from pronouncing any put-downs. Go out of your way to

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praise others for the qualities and characteristics you see and appreciate in them. Do not condemn but celebrate. Make it your aim for only praise to stream out of your mouth, and see if it isn't even sweeter and more refreshing than a cherry slushy on a hot summer day!

Prayer

Father, make me mindful today of the way I interact with others. May I praise and not put down. May my words impart grace to others and not show grumpiness. I want to spring forth words of life that refresh the spirit and point others to you. In Jesus's name, amen.

5

WEIGHT CONTROL



The heart of the righteous weighs its answers, but
the mouth of the wicked gushes evil. (Prov. 15:28)

One of my favorite Saturday morning pastimes is going to the farmer's market. The scene at this huge building filled with produce and goods from far and near is a delight to the senses. Colorful fresh-cut flowers. Bright raw veggies. Aromatic fruit. Handmade soaps and lotions. Woven textiles and dried herbs. For me, there is no better way to kick off the weekend than to stroll through the market, soaking in the textures and colors and smells as I shop.

Whenever I pick apples to make homemade pie, I opt for the Michigan Northern Spy variety. They are the best for my family's favorite dessert. "Spies for pies," my mother always taught me.

When selecting my apples, I make sure to weigh them on the farmer's old gray metal scale to ensure I have enough

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for a pie. (That would be just shy of three pounds per pie, if you must know!)

One by one, I place the apples onto the scale. When I get close to the three-pound mark, I have to choose the perfectly sized apple for the final one, one that will make the dial on the scale read exactly three pounds. It takes a little time, but by carefully weighing, I'm sure to have the perfect number of apples for my tasty pastry.

And so it is with our words. If we want to ensure a pleasant outcome, we need to weigh our words carefully. Especially—as today's challenge verse instructs—when giving someone an answer.

Before we answer children's requests, we must think through what is really best for them before we start to speak. Answering too quickly can lead to a sticky parental situation.

Before we answer a coworker or family member who might be upset with us, we need to consider our response cautiously, selecting phrases that will convey the truth but also promote understanding and peace. Speaking without weighing our words first may escalate the situation, causing an all-out verbal battle.

At times we may be asked a question that needs a gentle and tender response instead of a quick and thoughtless reply. (This is definitely easier said than done!) We need to sort through the options in our minds as we invite the Holy Spirit to give us just the right combination of fruitful words.

If we are to pursue righteousness, we must heed the advice of Proverbs 15:28: "The heart of the righteous weighs its answers."

WEIGHT CONTROL

Notice it says “the heart.” It doesn’t say the mouth.

Sometimes it’s too late to avoid damage by the time the words tumble out of our mouths. When I don’t first pause to pray and ponder in my heart, hurtful words may pour out. To avoid causing heartache and even regret, I’ve learned to contemplate words secretly in my heart, which means running my thoughts through the grid of Scripture before I ever let the words escape from my lips.

Back and forth. Back and forth. Searching for just the right—and righteous—fruitful combination.

Are you ready to carefully weigh your words today? The result will be a delightful offering, pleasing to you, to the hearer, and to God.

It might even be more wonderful than my famous apple pie à la mode!

Today’s Takeaways

- *Weigh carefully and measure meticulously.* Weighing and measuring are crucial in so many areas. When you bake a cake from scratch, you must be careful to measure the ingredients. If you don’t, your cake may come out dry—or worse yet, create a culinary flop good only for posting on *Pinterest.Fails*. Carpenters know the importance of measuring. Their slogan is “Measure twice. Cut once.” They don’t want to make a costly mistake, so they give measuring double importance. Weighing our words and measuring our verbal responses are also crucial to ensure a pleasant

outcome. Thinking before we speak can prevent us from failing in the area of communication. And it can help to avert a disastrous and costly outcome.

- *Watch your flow.* Proverbs 15:28 states that the mouth of the wicked “gushes evil.” When it comes to giving a response, gushing is not good. To gush means “to flow out rapidly and plentifully, often in a sudden stream or burst.” When we gush, we have little time to pause and pray. Make it your aim today to slow down the flow of your words from a gush to a trickle. When our words flow in a loving manner and at an appropriate pace, we will avert a damaging flood of feistiness and our relationships will flourish.

Lesson for the Lips

What percent of the time would you say you carefully weigh your words before speaking? Is it closer to 100 percent of the time or closer to . . . well . . . never? Be honest. Write the percentage below.

What are some questions you can learn to ask yourself before giving an answer to someone? Can you think of any helpful phrases to keep in mind that will help you weigh your words? If so, jot them down here:

Prayer

Father, today I will need to speak many words, both in person and online. With each interaction comes the potential for connection and understanding or for confusion, criticism, and conflict. Help me weigh my words carefully in my heart before I ever let them escape my lips. May I watch my conversational pace and point others to you with my words. I want the words I utter to bear much fruit for you. In Jesus's name, amen.