

Teacher's Guide for Living Holy

Theme: Holiness in Communication

Life Application:

Communicating with others in a manner that reflects holiness of heart, and a dedication to God.

Key Verse for Meditation:

For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile. – 1 Peter 3:10

Focus Scriptures:

Malachi 3:16; Matthew 12:34-37; Ephesians 4:29-31; James 3:2-13

Lesson Key:

Speech is one aspect of life which reveals character, and godly words from a pure heart can enlighten sinners of the love of God and the beauty of the Christian life. As holy people, set apart for God and His service, we should take care that God is glorified by our words and that His righteousness is manifested in our communication with those around us.

Introduction:

The fact that we are children of God who have been justified by His grace, cleansed by His Spirit, and set apart for His service should manifest itself in our speech. As Christians who are focused on living holy lives, we should not only be scrupulous about our actions, our thoughts, and our motives, but we should also be very careful about the words we speak.

Scriptures are clear that the words of the mouth spring from the heart. Thus, Christians should have no part in speech that includes evils of the tongue: lying, deceit, flattery, gossip, profanity, backbiting, murmuring, false witness, immoral conversation, boasting, etc.

Holiness in our speech, however, goes far beyond shunning evil forms of communication. Holy speech will be characterized by restraint and humility. It will be marked by the spirit of charity and kindness. It will edify, uplift, and encourage. The holy person will be aware of the fact that there is a “time to keep silence, and a time to speak” (Ecclesiastes 3:7), and will be eager to share with others the goodness of God and His salvation. Holy speech will be controlled by the Spirit of God, and will reflect the believer’s union with Christ.

Opener Ideas/Activities:

Bring a can of spreadable cheese to class. Demonstrate how easy it is to squirt out the contents from the can. Then pick a volunteer and ask him to try to put the cheese back into the can. Of course, that is impossible. The point is that criticism, derogatory names, mean comments, or negative, angry, sarcastic words are easy to say. But it is impossible to “unsay” them, once said. And it may be difficult or impossible to fix the damage done by them.

Relate the following story: There once was a little boy with a bad temper. His father gave him a bag of nails and told him that every time he lost his temper, he was to hammer a nail in the back fence. The first day the boy had driven thirty-seven nails into the fence. After a while, the boy discovered it was easier to hold his temper than to drive those nails into the fence. Eventually the day came when the boy did not lose his temper at all. He told his father about it and the father suggested that the boy now pull out one nail for each day that he was able to hold his temper. The days passed and the young boy

was finally able to tell his father that all the nails were gone. The father took his son by the hand and led him to the fence saying, “You have done well, my son, but look at the holes in the fence. The fence will never be the same. When you say things in anger, they leave a scar just like this one. You can put a knife in a man and draw it out, but no matter how many times you say ‘I’m sorry,’ the wound is still there.” The point is that a verbal wound, like a physical one, can leave irreparable damage. (You can demonstrate this object lesson by having a student hammer a nail into the wood, and then remove it. Pass the damaged wood around the class to show the scars left.)

“Shockingly Negative” – This video clip available for download from SermonCentral.com could be a good opener or discussion starter. Search for “Shockingly Negative” at <http://sermoncentral.sermons spice.com>.

Speech is like food: they both can come in many different flavors and leave people with a taste in their mouths. Ask several people to taste different types of food—some salty, sour, sweet, bland, cold, a comfort food, etc. Note the expressions they make when they eat the foods and relate this to the reaction we want our speech to leave with others. We want people to leave a conversation with us having a desire to come back for more!

Matthew 12:36 says, “Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.” For a skit, act out a trial where someone defends his decision to make negative comments (participating in gossip, complaining, exaggerating a story, etc.). For his defense, use common excuses like “I don’t think it really hurt anyone” and “I was just stating the facts of what happened.”

Relate to your class that a church in Kansas City, Missouri, decided to challenge themselves to stop complaining. They began with the goal of twenty-one consecutive no-complaint days and found it rather difficult. Here are some excerpts from Pastor Will Bowen’s experience:

“ . . . The first day . . . I was complaining all the time. I wanted to call it quits but everyone at church was watching me. After the first week, I made it [complaining] only about five times in one day. The next day, I was back up to twelve times. I never thought of myself as a person who complained but I was finding out otherwise.

“ . . . I found that I could do very well around some people but not so well around others. Sadly, I realized that my relationships with some people I considered good friends centered on expressing our dissatisfaction about whatever we were talking about. I began to avoid them. I felt guilty at first but I really found myself beginning to feel happier. . . ”

Questions from Student Handout:

1. According to Matthew 12:36-37, for what will we give an account to God?

This text says we will give an account for every idle word, and that by our words we will be justified or condemned. What a soul-searching thought!

The Greek word argos, translated idle, means “inactive or useless.” This word corresponds to the Hebrew word shave, which signifies not only vain or empty, but also wicked and injurious, such as a false testimony against a neighbor.

2. How will having a pure heart and an awareness that we are set apart for God influence our speech? See Matthew 12:34.

When the heart is cleansed, the source of carnal speech is purified. Sanctification provides a perfect heart—a state of living where a person loves the Lord with all of his heart, soul, mind, and

strength. Thus, every word, along with every deed, will spring from a heart that is motivated by devotion to God. As sanctified individuals, our desire will be to make sure that our words are always appropriate and edifying. When we fall short due to a human nature which remains imperfect until glorification, we will desire to be corrected by the Spirit and will ask for His help to continue to grow more like Him in this area (along with all other areas).

3. What types of speech will come from a pure and holy heart? Psalm 35:28; 37:30; Proverbs 15:26; Ecclesiastes 3:7; Isaiah 50:4; Romans 12:14; 1 Corinthians 2:4-5; Ephesians 4:25, 29; James 1:19

After giving your students time to suggest their answers, you may wish to have volunteers in your class read aloud the following verses. It might be interesting to compile a list based on answers from your students, and the thoughts brought out in the verses.

- *Psalm 35:28 – Full of praise*
- *Psalm 37:30 – Full of wisdom*
- *Proverbs 15:26 – In purity and good taste*
- *Ecclesiastes 3:7 – Keeping silent when appropriate*
- *Isaiah 50:4 – Encouraging to others*
- *Romans 12:14 – Extending blessing*
- *1 Corinthians 2:4-5 – Directed by the Spirit*
- *Ephesians 4:25 – Absolutely truthful*
- *Ephesians 4:29 – Edifying*
- *James 1:19 – Restrained*

*A follow-up question would be: What types of speech will **not** arise out of a pure and holy heart?*

- *Ephesians 5:4 – Filthiness, foolish talking, or jesting (making light of or mocking things sacred)*
- *Psalm 12:2 – Falsehoods, flattery, and deception*
- *Jude 16 – Prideful, boasting*
- *Titus 3:2; James 4:11 – Speaking evil of others*
- *Proverbs 6:19 – Sowing discord*
- *Psalm 101:5 – Slander*
- *Ephesians 4:31 – Bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, evil speaking*
- *1 Peter 3:10 – Guile*
- *Matthew 5:33-37 – Swearing*

4. James likened the damage the tongue can do to that of a fire (see James 3:3-5). Name at least three ways the two could be alike.

Thoughts offered in class discussion could include that both words and fire can spread destruction quickly. Both can be hard to contain. Both can cause tremendous pain and damage. Both can be caused by carelessness as well as direct intent. Scars remain from the effects of an uncontrolled tongue or an uncontrolled blaze. Both can cause irreparable damage (a fire—heirlooms, photographs, etc.; words—self-image of a child, etc.)

5. How should we obey the instructions given in James 1:19 in our own lives?

Your students will probably agree on the benefits of thinking before we speak. Proverbs 17:28 admonishes, “Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding.” The point should be made that talking comes fairly easily to most of us. Keeping silent does not; it takes discipline!

6. There is a saying that, “Small minds talk about people; mediocre minds talk about events; great minds talk about ideas.” What, then, would a great Christian mind talk about?

It is easy to answer this question with words such as Christian ideas, pure and holy topics. However, it might be interesting to discuss with your class ways we can talk about the Lord and Christian ideas without seeming odd, holier-than-thou, etc. How can we make talking about the Lord a “natural” thing so it appeals to others? The point should be made that it will need to be a natural thought process inside of us first.

Additional Questions:

Why is taming the tongue so important? James 3:3-5

The tongue has tremendous potential. Restraining the tongue is important because its power is disproportionately large. It can do great good or cause great harm.

What are chronic or habitual speech problems indicative of? See Luke 6:45.

Chronic speech problems are indicative of a heart problem. One author said, “Trying to suppress our ugly words is like attacking a termite problem by squashing the few bugs that venture into the light of day. Unless we fumigate the foundation, those invaders will continue to flourish beneath the surface—and there will always be more where they came from. The problem is not with our mouths, it’s with our hearts.” [From “Why Did I Say That?” by Susan Maycinik, in Discipleship Journal.]

Encouraging others is one of the positive speech habits that should be cultivated. What are some ways we can master the art of encouragement?

You could have your class look at Isaiah 50:4. This verse reveals a secret of effective encouragement: staying in contact with God through prayerful interaction in His Word. As we do this, He brings people to our minds and gives us insight on how to encourage them. As we follow God’s promptings in this area, we will see God orchestrating the right word for the right person at the right time.

We have to train ourselves to look for opportunities to speak a word of encouragement. It takes practice! Initially, we may feel a bit awkward, but we must make the effort. It will gradually become more “natural” and God will bless us for making an attempt, even when it is difficult.

Many kinds of wrong speech spring from pride. Proverbs 8:13 states that pride and arrogance promote evil behavior and speech. According to Psalm 10, boasting, reviling God, cursing, and lying are all based in pride. Psalm 59 lets us know that the righteous are slandered by those who are proud. Gossip is another product of a proud heart, as are scoffing, malice and threats (see Psalm 73:6-11). In contrast, what will be some hallmarks of humble speech?

Class discussion will likely bring out some of the following thoughts. Those who speak from a heart of humility will give credit for any successes to God. They will be honest about their weaknesses, and charitable about the weaknesses of others. They will not attempt to draw attention to themselves. They will not insist on their own way, nor seek to show off what they know. They will not be given to exaggerating. They will not castigate one who makes mistakes, because they will be well aware that “there, but for the grace of God, go I.” They will surrender their own agendas and allow their words to be directed by God, whose words are always perfect.

It is easy to drift into careless speech habits that, while perhaps not directly sinful, are certainly not edifying. How might grumbling, negativity, and complaining contradict our testimony of heart holiness and joy and peace in Christ?

The point should be made that others often evaluate our Christian lives based on our speech.

Grumbling, negativity, and complaining can reflect a prideful or self-centered attitude, and a lack of love for others. Ask your class: If honest evaluation of our speech shows these characteristics creeping in, what should we do? They should understand that we must go to God and seek His forgiveness, asking Him to heal the heart attitudes that are reflected by this type of communication, and seeking His help to grow and mature in our speech as in all aspects of our Christian walk.

Jude 16 mentions several different problems that arise from one's words. What are they?

Jude speaks of murmuring, complaining, and speaking great swelling words. Why are each of these unholy? Such words do not honor or glorify God.

Bible Background:

The Word of God attaches great significance to speech. To understand that, take a concordance and look up such words as *lips, mouth, tongue, talk, words, and speech*. Then check out *edify, prophesy, teach, praise, and worship*. Finally, look over *boasting, cursing, evil speaking, reviling, swearing, oaths, slander, and flattery*.

Christianity does not, of course, reside in the form of the word spoken. However, the words one speaks are an outward expression of the inward man. The true child of God wishes to use his words for the glory of God.

Word Search:

In James 3:7-8, the writer presents a metaphor—that of taming animals. He says that every kind of beast, bird, reptile, and sea creature can be tamed by mankind. The word translated *tamed* in verse 7 means “subdued” or “brought under control.” In Genesis, God gave man dominion over all of the animal kingdom, so man has the capacity to subdue and control them. The tongue, though, is like a wild beast no human being can bring under control.

No human can tame the tongue—but God can! The Psalmist said, “He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay. . . . And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God” (Psalm 40:2-3). A new heart produces new speech!

Supplemental Resources:

“Word Power” by Darrel Lee, *Higher Way* Vol.98-3

“The Power of Encouragement” by Dwight Baltzell, *Higher Way* Vol.91-1

“Tongue in Check” by Karen Barrett, *Light of Hope* Vol.84-6