

LIFE OR DEATH
WEEK 14

After studying James 3 this past week, we all agree that the tongue is a powerful object, which can be used for good or for evil. Unfortunately, it seems that being used for evil is a more natural use than for good. With one word, we can cut the heart in two, or we can bring joy and healing to the one on the receiving end of our words. We may not have lethal weapons in our possession, such as guns, knives, hand grenades, etc., but we do have a weapon that has as much potential for death as conventional weapons have. We may not be able to bring physical death, but we can certainly deliver a blow so deadly that death comes in the emotional, spiritual, and mental realm.

Read Proverbs 18:21 and complete it.

_____ and _____ are in the _____ of the
_____, and those who _____ it will _____ of its
_____.”

Meditate on these words for a while, then write what you believe is meant by “life and death are in the power of the tongue.” _____

Can you remember incidences in your life in which you were either the cause of “death” because of what you said or how you said it, or you were the recipient of destructive words? Please write the incident and if you were the recipient, what effect it had on you? _____

On the other hand, do you remember times when kind and encouraging words brought life to your soul and spirit? If so, please write about the incident(s) and the effect it had on you. _____

Read Proverbs 15:1-10. When in an angry situation, how can we diffuse or turn the anger of another? _____

What does a “harsh” word stir up? _____

The Hebrew word for “harsh” is ‘*esteb* and it has the meaning of *an earthen vessel; usually (painful) toil; also a pang (whether of body or mind):—*

grievous, idol, labor, sorrow. The word is derived from the verb ‘astab and can be used to depict the physical pain of childbirth (Gen. 3:16) or of emotional pain,

such as that caused by inappropriate words. Ouch!! A harsh word can produce the same painful results as childbirth produces! If you have ever given birth, you know how painful that is. In Genesis 3:16, God told Eve that one of the consequences of her disobedience to Him was that she would have pain in childbirth! Childbirth hurts, but the end result is a beautiful baby to love and hold and have as your own. With harsh words, the pain that is caused has no positive end result or outcome; only “death” to the spirit of the one on the receiving end and judgement to the one delivering the deadly blows.

For what it’s worth, I don’t believe we truly grasp the power of our words, for good or for evil. If we did, we would be more careful in how we speak to and about one another. They are so powerful that how a child views himself can be determined by the words spoken to him at an early age. There is a true story of a child who was born with a deformity to her face that was so severe that it was hard for anyone to look at her. Instead of being a lonely, sad, and self-loathing girl, she was happy and joyful all the time. When asked one day by someone how she saw herself, she said she sees herself as beautiful! In shock at the unexpected answer, she was asked how she could think she was beautiful, to which she happily replied, “Because my daddy tells me how beautiful I am every day!” That is an example of the power of words being used for good in another’s life.

Rather than fill these pages with comments and questions from me, please look up each of the following scriptures that speak of the tongues and words we say. Before you begin, ask the Lord to show you if there any ways in which you allow your tongue to be used for evil or destruction in someone else’s life. Write down any thoughts, convictions, new truth—anything that speaks to you from the verses. Let the truth of the Word speak to your heart and prayerfully respond accordingly. I’ll pray for you, you pray for me. May we all be reflections of God’s love to others in word and deed.

Characteristics of the tongue:

Small but important: James 3:5 _____

Untamable: James 3:6-8 _____

Source of trouble: Proverbs 21:23 _____

Means of sin: Psalm 39:1 _____

Known by God: Psalm 139:4 _____

Used for Destruction:
Backbiting: Proverbs 25:23; I Timothy 5:13 _____

As of fire: Acts 2:3 _____

Deceitful: Micah 6:12; Jeremiah 9:8 _____

Double: I Timothy 3:8 _____

False: Psalm 120:3 _____

Flattering: Proverbs 6:23; Proverbs 5:3-4 _____

Lying: Proverbs 21:6 _____

Perverse: Proverbs 17:20 _____

Hypocritical: I Corinthians 13:1 _____

Gentle: Proverbs 25:15 _____

Wholesome: Proverbs 15:4 _____

Wise: Proverbs 15:2 _____

James 1:19; 26

The tongue is a powerful tool in the body of man, woman, and child. With it we can build up or tear down. We can praise God or we can murmur and complain. We can speak life or speak death. With our praise to God, the devil will flee from us; he will not stay where there is praise to God. The Psalms are full of praises and worship to our God and King. I urge you to continue in the Word and write down verses of praise that you can find.

When you are down, call out these praises to Your Daddy, Father.

When you are tempted to gossip, speak harshly, or put another down, especially to children, take a deep breath and pray for strength and grace to respond the way the Lord would have you to do. Say to the Lord, as David did in Psalm 39:1, "I will set a guard over my mouth, lest I sin with my tongue."

For all of us, let us pray in this way:

"May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart,

Be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord my strength and my Redeemer."

Psalm 19:14

If we can do that, then our tongues and words will be used for life, not death!