

Maple Springs Baptist Church

Series: Life Hacks for Tough Times & Rough Relationships

Week 4: The Tongue

Your tongue is very powerful it can be used for good or for bad. Your tongue can be used to build somebody up and make their day, or to just destroy them. Your tongue can be used to make people laugh or make people cry, to speak truth or to speak lies and spread rumors.

Sometimes your tongue is also a source of embarrassment. We've all had those moments where words begin to come out of our mouth before our brain has a chance to give them intelligence. You wish you could reel the words back in.

But the tongue is way more than just a source of embarrassment. Your tongue is really powerful. Think of times where just a few simple words changed everything.

You experience life through words. Words are incredibly powerful. Think back over your story and remember things that were said to you, that shaped your identity, your self-confidence; they shaped who you are.

Your history was shaped by words. All of our history has been shaped by words. In fact, we can sum up major historical moments with just small little sound bites. ...

Words have shaped and changed history. And your words are shaping the history of others. If you're honest with yourself, there's not one of us that doesn't shudder with a little bit of regret when I say that your words have shaped other people's history. You can think back to things you've said and wish you could take them back.

Good news, the same grace that exists to forgive you of your sins, exist to transform your life, including your tongue. You see, words are incredibly powerful. And I would argue that the words that you say will shape your history more so than any of those great communicators.

Your words carry weight. We speak between 20,000 and 40,000 words a day and I think God wants to speak into the way we use those words. The tagline of this series is how to manage tough times and rough relationships and let's be honest most of us when we go through tough times and rough relationships, it's as a result of words that we've said or someone else has said.

You see, the phrase "sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me," we like it because it rhymes and it flows easily but the longer you live the more you realize it's just

not true. Words can hurt. No matter how powerful you think your words are, the Bible says they are even more powerful. And you can see it in Genesis 1. The very beginning of scripture, I've always thought it was interesting that God didn't just create the world. He spoke it into existence. He painstakingly and carefully spoke the world into existence. He said, "Let there be light," and He walked through creating the world.

You see, our words create worlds. Get this, your words are creating worlds that your kids live in, that your spouse exists in, that your company exists in. Your words create worlds, and the worlds that you create are a direct reflection of the words that you have spoken. And maybe, maybe that's why James spends so much time talking about our tongue and the words that we say.

James 1:19. It's interesting that James mentions the tongue in all 5 chapters of this book. James 1:19, here's the first of many warnings James is giving us. Here's what he says ...

James is starting with a very simple warning, a very broad stroke warning saying listen—you should listen a whole lot, you should talk sparingly, and you should never speak when you're angry because your words have great power. And then James changes the topic.

He picks it back up again in chapter 3. James 3:3. James spends the nearly entire chapter here talking about the tongue and he paints for 3 metaphors, 3 pictures of what the tongue is. And his whole point in all these metaphors—these yellow flashing warning lights—that your tongue is very powerful. Be careful how you use it.

So let's pick up in verse 3, his first two metaphors: **James 3:3-5a**. What James is doing is, he's painting a picture of well-known objects that are known to be very small but have a lot of power.

Have you been around a horse? A bit it's a little like a one-pound metal thing you placed in the mouth of a horse. And that one-pound bit can drive a 1200-pound animal wherever you want to drive it. If you've ever been on a cruise ship, there's a very small rudder in the back of a megaton cruise ship that steers the entire ship. And James is saying, listen your tongue is very small inside your mouth, but it drives your entire life. Your tongue is something of the steering wheel of your life.

And James is saying, listen some of us are letting our tongues steer our life, and without proper control it's very dangerous. It would be just like if we decided to play a game as we drive in a car. Let's see how long you can take your hands off the steering wheel. We just take our hands off the wheel. Now you could probably exist like that for a little bit but eventually your car will need direction.

You can let your tongue go without control for a while but eventually it will need direction. You see what James is telling us is we have to be careful because if you let your tongue drive your life, without control, it will crash and burn which leads us to his third metaphor.

Let's look at **verse 5**. James says... James, that escalated very quickly from a bit in the horse's mouth to your tongue is fire set on fire by hell. Here's what he's saying. He's saying just like fire your tongue creates small sparks with words. And those small sparks can burn down a whole forest.

This is a matchbook. This little matchbook can sit in the palm of my hands. And you look at that and say, "What harm is that?" You see inside this matchbook has enough power to burn down every tree on this property. This matchbook has enough power to start a fire that would burn down thousands of acres.

What James is saying is "Listen, you can start fires with your mouth that you cannot extinguish with your life." That should bring some sobriety to the moment. You can start fires with just small little words in your kids lives that will burn in their head for decades. Many of you are living that right now. You can say things in your first year of marriage that start a little spark and burn as a forest fire in the mind of your spouse for decades. James is simply saying, heads up your tongue is really powerful.

This is what James is warning, "Listen, your tongue can burn down your life you're not careful." We've all been there. We've all said words that blew up in our face.

Once words leave your mouth they are uncontainable and uncontrollable. When we strike that match and light that fuse you no longer have control over what's going to happen. The same is true with your words once you speak a word you relinquish control. What James is saying, just caution, as long as you keep that word inside you have a chance to process it, to think it through, to add wisdom to the emotion of the moment, to take it to God and say, "God, give me give me clarity on this this thing I'm about to say."

David even wrestled through this. In **Psalms 139:23-24a** he says ... Even David is wrestling saying, "God, look into my heart. Is there something inside me that's hurtful? Is there a better way to say this? You see, there's a reason that God placed our tongue behind our teeth and our lips because your tongue needs restraint. There are things we can say that can burn down our life. It's almost like James is saying that words are one of the few things that don't follow Newton's third law of physics.

Newton says for every action there's an equal and opposite reaction. But James is kind of saying that's just not true with words. For every word spoken there's an uncontainable and an uncontrollable reaction.

I don't think we do get it because we all, myself included, still say things like this: "All I said was this and my wife lost her mind ... All I said was this and my dad just about killed me ... All I said was this and my boss fired me ... All I said was this spark and I burnt a forest down... and we're still shocked by it. You see, we still don't get this because we think this way: All I did was strike a match. How in the world could the whole forest burn down? That's what James trying is trying to bring into our thinking.

Once words leave your mouth, they are uncontainable and uncontrollable. Parents, you can speak words to your kids now that will breathe confidence and self-esteem and the love of God into their life. And once you say it, it is out of your control and it grows up into a burning fire within them in the good sense. Or parents, you can begin to speak words into your kids' lives right now that will smolder and burn for years that they will eventually sit with a counselor and have to unpack. Once you say it it's out of your control.

This reminds me of a story by Tim Sanders. Tim Sanders was an executive at Yahoo and he wrote a book called *Saving The World At Work*. In his book he tells the true story he calls the Xbox story.

James is telling us you are words in any given moment are life and death for somebody. Proverbs 18 tells us the tongue has the power of life and death and those who love it will eat its fruit.

James is telling us be careful with your words and interestingly, James as finishes his thoughts on the tongue he never gives us any practical advice. So what do we do now if my tongue is steering my life and I have the potential to burn down marriages and relationships and the company I work at and there's so much danger involved what should I do with that? That's the beauty of the life hack series, because I think God wants to speak in very practically. And the most practical areas of our life are words.

3 life hacks: So here's the first one. The first life hack is **shut up when you're angry**.

When you feel that anger growing up in your gut, the best thing we can do is call time out, calm down, and shut your mouth. Think about how many times in your life you would have loved to have my friend on the sidelines of your life to call a time out and say "shut up, shut your mouth. Don't do it."

Some of you would still be in marriages, some of you would still have jobs, some of you would still have relationship with your kids if only we could have grabbed a hold of this. And right about now everyone in the room is thinking about someone they know that you think needs to shut up. But you're missing the whole point I'm talking to you. We give ourselves all kinds of

excuses and running our mouth because we say, "I'm just being honest. I'm just saying, it was the truth ... that dress did make her... don't say that ... I'm just being honest. I'm telling the truth."

If you think you can survive a world where people say everything that's true all the time, you're wrong. You see honesty is not saying everything that's true all the time. Honesty is making sure that everything you do say is true.

If you're follower of Jesus that brief pause before you say that hurtful destructive statement, that's the Holy Spirit giving an opportunity to stop. The Holy Spirit in his kindness is saying pause. Stop. Shut up. So if you want to grow up, the first time the Holy Spirit says shut up don't dismiss it.

The first life hack is shut up. The second one is **speak up while you have the time**. I don't know if you've ever noticed this but in our culture for whatever reason, sometimes it requires a funeral to give us the confidence to speak up and tell someone how we really felt about them.

Let me just speak to men for a second. Guys we struggle with this. Our kids and our spouses are dying to hear us speak up. And in great part, we are silent. Men, your voice should be the most heard voice in your home. I'm not talking about volume. I'm talking about value. I am sick and tired of adults who tell me I've never heard my dad say I love you. And we give the excuse "They know I love them. I provide for them. I pay the bills." That's great but what James is saying is there's something incredibly powerful about the voice of a father building up his kids, his spouse. Saying "I love you", "I'm proud of you", "I'm so glad that you're my son, you're my daughter", "I'm so blessed to have you as my wife." Men, we've got to learn to speak up.

And for all of us, I think there are everyday moments that God invites us to speak up just. I think we pass people every day that God gives us the opportunity to speak up.

So, the first life hack was shut up. The second one speak up. Our last life hack is **clean up what you burn down**. Parents, the words "clean-up" are like a broken record in our head, one of the top ten phrases that parents say between the time their kids are born in 18. One of the top ten is clean-up. Clean up your room. Clean up the mess you made. Clean up the food on the table. Clean up yourself.

We say "clean up" all the time and yet when it comes to cleaning up after the messes our words make, it doesn't come as natural. You see, **when we speak words and burns someone down the least we should do is step back in and take ownership of the fire**. Many of us have fires still burning in corners of our life. We've just avoided them. Once you start the fire, you walk away and avoid it cause it's easier that way. And maybe for some of us, the life hack you need to lean into is clean up what you burn down. How do you do that? That gets complicated.

How do you clean up what you burn down? Here's a couple simple things. First of all, there are two sides to every fire. Own up to your side of the fire. You did some stuff; I did some stuff and I'm owning my piece of that. Once you own up to your side of the fire, stop talking. Everything else you say after that sounds like an excuse. You don't light more matches to extinguish a fire, right? It's your words that got you into trouble in the first place. And then, thirdly, change. You don't demonstrate change through more words. You demonstrate that through actions.

We've got to learn to clean up what we burned down. But if we're honest, I think there's people in this room that can say, "Pastor, that's a clever way to say it: 'Let's clean up,' and I like how it how it teaches in a message like this. But you don't know the things I've said to people. You don't know the fires that I've started. And that's a great thought, but there's no way I can actually clean that up." Or maybe you're on the other side, and you're saying, "You don't know what that guy said to me. You don't know what that person's done to me. You better hope they don't come and try to clean that one up because it's going to go bad. There's no way I could forgive."

That's why the gospel is so powerful. Forgiveness is not natural. Retribution is natural. You burn me, I burn you. We all go home. But God offers us a better way. God knew the cost of sin was death, and He knew the price of forgiveness would take His Son Jesus dying for us. The gospel flipped everything on its head. There are messes that you simply can't clean up on your own. There's forgiveness that you can't offer people on your own. And the beauty of the gospel is God says, "I forgave you much and now you go forgive others."

When we wrestle through this and say, "I don't know how to forgive this person," or "I don't know how to humble myself" and begin to form the words of "I'm sorry," we look to the cross. That is the picture of forgiveness for us. And when you've been forgiven of much, you're freed up to forgive others.

So before we end this message, I want to ask 3 simple questions. The first one is: When do you need to shut up? What are the moments that you just know, "I've got to learn to shut my mouth?" Secondly, who do you need to speak up to? Your kids? Your family? A coworker? And lastly, where do you need to clean up what you burned down?