

T Does Your **TONGUE** **H** Need **HEALING?**

*Since DEATH and LIFE
are in the power of the
tongue, it is imperative to
know how it may be healed.*

DEREK PRINCE

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DOES YOUR TONGUE NEED HEALING?

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Chapter One

Death or Life?

The title for this study is a question: *Does Your Tongue Need Healing?* As we follow this theme, you may be in for some surprises!

Let me begin by pointing out something very significant about the way in which the Creator designed the human head. Every one of us has seven openings in our head, the number in Scripture which often denotes completeness. We have three pairs of openings: two eyes, two ears, and two nostrils. But the Creator restricted the seventh opening to one, the mouth. I have often asked people, "How many of you wish you had more

than one mouth?" But I have never met anyone who did. Most of us have all we can do to use one mouth properly. This one opening causes us more problems than all the other six together!

If you take a Bible concordance and look up all the words related to that one opening such as "mouth," "tongue," "lips," "speech," "words," and so on, you will be amazed how much the Bible has to say about this subject, and it is with good reason. There is no area in our personality more directly related to our total well-being than the mouth and tongue.

Death or Life?

In the first section of this study I wish to share a number of passages of Scripture which all emphasize the vital importance of the mouth and the tongue. Then, in subsequent sections, I will deal with principles that arise out of these Scriptures. First, we will consider Psalm 34:11-13:

¹¹Come, my children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD.

¹²Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days,

¹³keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies.

(NIV)

The inspired Word of God offers to teach us, as God's children, the fear of the Lord. I have a series of audio cassettes which point out that there is nothing in all Scripture to which there is attached greater blessing, fruitfulness and assurance than the fear of the Lord. So when the Scripture offers to teach us the fear of the Lord, it is offering something of infinite value and worth. By implication, the psalmist says here that "*life*" and "*many good days*" go with the fear of the Lord. In Scripture, life in its fullness and the fear of the Lord are always associated together. The measure in which we have the fear of the Lord is the measure in which we enjoy true life.

Practically speaking, where does the fear of the Lord begin? It is very clear. The psalmist says, "*Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies.*" In other words, the first area of our life in which the fear of the Lord will be practically manifested is our tongue and our lips. If we can keep our tongue from evil and our

lips from speaking lies, then we can move on into the fullness of the fear of the Lord.

Then, out of the fear of the Lord comes life and many good days. The fear of the Lord, life, good days, and the proper use and control of our tongues and our lips are all bound together. We cannot really have good lives if we do not control our tongues and our lips.

Proverbs 13:3 states:

*³He who guards his lips guards his soul,
but he who speaks rashly will come to ruin.*

(NIV)

Your soul is your whole personality. It is the real you. This is the area where weakness will be manifested first and where the enemy will gain access first. If you want to guard your soul, you must guard your lips. But if you speak rashly, you will come to ruin. The alternatives are very clear. If you control the tongue, then you have protection; but if your tongue gets out of control and you are not master of your words, then the end is ruin. It is so clear; there are no blurred edges.

The whole book of Proverbs is full of these principles. Consider Proverbs 21:23:

*²³He who guards his mouth and his tongue
keeps himself from calamity.*

(NIV)

Again, the vital area that you must protect is your mouth and your tongue. Once again, the alternatives are black and white. There is no gray. If you guard your mouth and tongue, then you guard your soul and your life. You are safe. But if you fail to do that, the alternative is calamity. "Calamity" is a very strong word and I believe the Bible uses it deliberately. The failure to guard our lips and our tongues will ultimately bring us to calamity.

There are two other passages in the book of Proverbs concerning the use of the tongue which are particularly significant.

*⁴A wholesome tongue is a tree of life: but
perverseness therein is a breach in the
spirit.*

(Proverbs 15:4 KJV)

Where the King James Version says, "*a wholesome tongue*," the literal Hebrew says, "the healing of the tongue." This clearly indicates that our tongue can need healing. I believe the tongue of every sinner needs healing. The tongue is one area where sin is always manifested in

every life. There are some areas in which a sinner may not offend. But the tongue is one area in which every sinner offends, and it must be healed.

"The healing of the tongue is a tree of life." Notice again the close connection between life and the correct use of the tongue. The alternative is, *"perverseness therein is a breach in the spirit."* Perverseness means "the wrong use." The misuse of the tongue is a breach, or a leak, in the spirit.

I remember once being in a service where a visiting preacher prayed for a certain person and said, "Lord, fill her with the Holy Spirit."

But the pastor who knew her said, "Don't, Lord; she leaks."

Many get filled and blessed, but it runs out through their tongues. You must keep a tight reign on your tongue if you are going to contain the blessing of the Lord. It is one thing to be blessed; it is another thing to contain the blessing. The healing of the tongue is a tree of life that brings life to us and to others. It works

inwardly and outwardly.

²¹Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit.

(Proverbs 18:21 NAS)

The alternatives are always so clear. It is either death or life. They are both in the power of the tongue. If we use our tongues properly, they will be a tree of life. But if we use our tongues improperly, then the result is death; and whichever way we use our tongues, we can be sure we will eat the fruit. Each one of us eats the fruit of our own tongue. If the fruit is sweet, we will eat sweet fruit. If the fruit is bitter, we will feed on bitter fruit. God has ordained it that way.

The tongue is the decisive member. Death and life are in the power of the tongue.

Chapter Two

The Heart Overflows through the Mouth

Our theme will be made a little more relevant by an illustration. During World War II, I was a hospital attendant with the British Army in North Africa. At one time, I was appointed the NCO in charge of a small reception station in the desert that catered only to dysentery patients.

Each morning the doctor under whom I worked would summon me and we would go on rounds of our patients who were all lying there on stretchers right on the sand. I noticed that every morning the

doctor always greeted each patient with the same two sentences. The first one was, "Good morning, how are you?" The second one was, "Show me your tongue."

It was not long before I realized that the doctor paid very little attention to the answer to his question, "How are you?" He always moved on immediately to the next question, "Show me your tongue." When the patient stuck his tongue out, the doctor looked very carefully at it. Then he formed his estimate of the patient's condition, much more from looking at his tongue than from the answer the patient actually gave to the question, "How are you?"

That stuck with me, and later, as I moved on into the ministry, many times it occurred to me that God does much the same with us as that doctor did with his patients. God may ask us, "How are you?" and we may give him an estimate of our condition. But I think the next thing that God says, metaphorically, is, "Show me your tongue." And when God looks at our tongues, then He forms His own estimate of our true spiritual condition. The state of

your tongue is a very sure guide to your spiritual condition.

Now we will apply that from Scripture. Many passages establish the principle that there is a direct connection between the heart and the mouth. Jesus states, in Matthew 12:33-37:

³³Either make the tree good, and its fruit good; or make the tree rotten, and its fruit rotten; for the tree is known by its fruit.

³⁴You brood of vipers [He's speaking to the religious leaders of His time], how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.

³⁵The good man out of his good treasure brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth what is evil.

³⁶And I say to you, that every careless word that men shall speak, they shall render account for it in the day of judgment. ³⁷For by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned.

(NAS)

Jesus here establishes the direct connection between the mouth and the heart using parabolic language. He refers to the heart as the tree and to the words that come out of the mouth as the fruit.

And the kind of words that come out of your mouth will indicate the condition of your heart. He says, for instance, *"A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good words; an evil man, out of the evil treasure in his heart brings forth evil words."* You will notice Jesus uses the word "good" three times, and He uses the word "evil" three times. If the heart is good, then out of the mouth will come words that are good. But if the heart is evil, then out of the mouth will come words that are evil.

In Matthew 7:17-18, Jesus expresses in similar language:

¹⁷...every good tree bears good fruit; but the rotten tree bears bad fruit.

¹⁸A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a rotten tree produce good fruit.

(NAS)

The nature of the tree inevitably determines the kind of fruit. Conversely, when we see the kind of fruit, we know the nature of the tree. The tree is the heart and the fruit is the mouth. If the heart is good, the words that come from the mouth will be good. But if the words that come from the mouth are evil, we

know that the heart is evil. You cannot have bad fruit from a good tree, nor can you have good fruit from a bad tree. There is an absolute, inescapable connection between the state of the heart and the state of the mouth.

We may deceive ourselves about the state of our hearts with all sorts of ideas about our own goodness, purity or righteousness, but the sure and unfailing indicator is what comes out of our mouths. If that which comes out of our mouths is corrupt, then our hearts are corrupt. There can be no other conclusion.

I did educational work for five years in East Africa. One of the tribes I worked with was the Marigoli tribe. I was amazed to discover that the same word in that language meant "heart" and "voice." I used to wonder how to determine which one the person meant. Does he mean "your heart" or "your voice"? But as I pondered it, I began to see the real insight in the use of that particular language. In reality, the voice indicates the heart. The voice tells with words what is the condition of the heart. This is the same as

Jesus said: you cannot have bad words out of a good heart, and you cannot have good words out of a bad heart.

When we come to God with an estimate of our own spiritual condition, I think God is prone to respond the same way that the doctor did with his dysentery patients in the desert. You might say, "God, I'm a very good Christian. I really love you, and I go to church." But God says, "Show me your tongue. When I've seen your tongue, I'll know the real condition of your heart."

I want to illustrate this by taking two prophetic pictures from the Old Testament: the first is of Christ Himself, the Messiah, and the second is of the bride of Christ, the church. Notice, in each case, the feature which is emphasized first and foremost is the condition of the lips and the mouth. Psalm 45:1-2 gives us a beautiful, prophetic picture of the Messiah:

¹My heart overflows with a good theme; I address my verses to the King; My tongue is the pen of a ready writer. [And then these are the words that the writer addresses to the King, to the Messiah:]

*²Thou art fairer than the sons of men;
Grace is poured upon Thy lips; Therefore
God has blessed Thee forever.*

(NAS)

Here is a picture of the Messiah in His grace, His beauty, and His moral purity. What is the first aspect of that beauty which is manifested? His lips. "Grace," it says, "is poured upon Thy lips." Then it says, "therefore God has blessed Thee forever."

Two very important principles are given here. First, the grace of the Messiah is manifested primarily in His lips. Second, God has blessed Him forever because of the grace of His lips. When Jesus appeared in human form and men were sent to arrest Him, they came back without Him and were asked, "Why didn't you bring Him in?" Their answer was, "No one ever spoke the way this man does" (John 7:45,46 NIV). The grace that poured from His lips marked Him out as the Messiah.

In the Song of Solomon, there is a prophetic picture of Christ and His bride and the relationship between them. Song of Solomon 4:3 is addressed to the bride:

*³Your lips are like a scarlet thread, And
your mouth is lovely. Your temples are like
a slice of a pomegranate Behind your veil.*

(NAS)

The first feature mentioned about the bride is her lips, "Your *lips are like a scarlet thread, and your mouth is lovely.*"

The word "scarlet" there indicates sanctification through the blood of Jesus. The lips have been touched by the blood. As a result, the mouth is lovely. Notice that the face is hidden behind a veil, "Your *temples are like a slice of a pomegranate,*" but they are behind a veil. Still, the voice is heard through the veil. The other beauties are veiled, but the beauty of the voice comes out through the veil. The voice is the thing most manifested. In the same chapter of the Song of Solomon, we read:

*"Your lips, my bride, drip honey;
Honey and milk are under your tongue,
And the fragrance of your garments is like
the fragrance of Lebanon.*

(Song of Solomon 4:11 NAS)

Notice the two distinctive words used of the tongue of the bride, "*honey and milk.*" They are also the two distinctive

features of the Promised Land. The beauty of the Promised Land is seen in the bride, and especially in her tongue and in her lips. There is a fragrance associated with these beautiful lips that penetrates the veil. Again, the clear form of the bride is not seen behind the veil, but her voice and her fragrance penetrate the veil due to the beauty of her lips. Her lips are like a thread of scarlet and her mouth is lovely.

Is that true of you and me as followers of Jesus? We need to ask ourselves that question.

Chapter Three

The Biblical Picture of the Tongue

We have considered thus far the direct connection between our hearts and our mouths, as summed up in the words of Jesus in Matthew 12:34: "*Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks*" (NIV). When the heart is filled, it overflows through the mouth, and that overflow tells us the real condition of the heart.

In the Old Testament there are portraits of Christ and of Christ's bride. For Christ the Messiah and His bride, the church, the first feature of the grace of

God and the spiritual and moral beauty is their lips and their speech.

We are now going to consider a biblical picture of the tongue itself. The epistle of James deals at length with this subject. First, consider some very searching remarks James makes about the kind of religion which God accepts and also the kind that He does not accept. James speaks about the kind of religion that is not acceptable to God:

²⁶If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.

(James 1:26 NIV)

It does not matter how religious we may claim to be. We may attend church, sing hymns and do all the other things that are expected of religious people. In themselves, all those things are good. We may do all those things, but if we do not keep our tongues under control, our religion is worthless and unacceptable to God. May God grant that all religious people would face up to this issue.

On the other hand, James speaks

about the kind of religion God accepts. Again, it is different from the practice of the average churchgoer today.

²⁷Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

(James 1:27 NIV)

The first positive requirement of pure religion is not churchgoing, or even Bible reading. It is looking after and showing practical love to those who are in need, primarily orphans and widows.

Let me suggest, if you are in any way religious, that you take time to look in this mirror of the Word of God found in James 1:26-27. If you do not control your tongue, your religion is worthless. If you want to have a religion that is accepted by God, it must be demonstrated first and foremost in caring for those who are in need: the orphans and the widows.

I think again about the doctor in the desert when he asked his patients how they felt. He really was not too interested in the answer because the next thing he always said was, "Show me your tongue."

That is really what James is saying in these two verses. If you want to impress God with your religion, the first thing He will say is, "Show me your tongue." He is going to judge from your tongue whether your religion is valid and acceptable or not.

James uses a number of pictures to illustrate the function of the tongue in our lives. First, James 3:2 says:

²We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check.

(NIV)

James is saying that if you can control your tongue, you can control your whole life. You are a perfect man if you can control your tongue. Then he goes on in the remainder of this passage to give some illustrations from the natural world. James 3:3-8 continues:

³When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal.

⁴Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go.

⁵Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark.

⁶The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell

⁷All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, ⁸but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

(NIV)

James is bringing out the unique significance and influence of the tongue for the whole course of our lives. The first example he uses is the bit in the horse's mouth. He says, "If we succeed in putting a bit in a horse's mouth, we can turn the whole animal around."

The horse, in the Bible, is usually a type of physical strength. James is saying that no matter how strong a horse is, if you can get control of its mouth with the bit, you can control the whole animal. The horse's strength is brought into subjection through the control of its mouth. The same is true with us. That which controls our mouths controls the whole course of

our lives.

The next example is perhaps a little more vivid. He compares the tongue to the rudder of a ship. A ship may be a great structure, but be carried to and fro by the tremendously powerful forces of the winds and the waves. Yet, in that ship there is only one decisive, small piece—the rudder. It is the use of the rudder that determines the whole course of the ship. If the rudder is used properly, the ship will arrive safely in the harbor. If the rudder is not used properly, the ship is likely to be shipwrecked.

James says it is the same in our lives. The tongue is the rudder. Our tongues control the course of our lives. If the rudder of the tongue is used properly, we will make it safely to our appointed destinations. But if our tongues are not used properly, we will be shipwrecked.

James also gives the example of a small spark that can start a forest fire. Every year in the United States, billions of dollars of damage is caused by forest fires, and they usually start just the way James says, with a small spark. The

Forest Department of the United States has a very vivid poster which says, "Only you can prevent forest fires."

That is also true in the spiritual realm. The tongue is like a little spark that can cause a forest fire of vast proportions, causing billions of dollars of damage. Many churches and religious groups no longer exist because one tongue set a spark that burned up the whole thing which could never be restored.

The final example James uses is that of a source of lethal poison. He says the tongue is like a deadly element that can poison us by spreading infection through the whole system of our lives.

Consider those examples again: the bit in the horse's mouth, the rudder in the ship, the spark that starts a forest fire, and a poison that is injected into the life stream. The principle underlying each of these illustrations is the same: the tongue is a small part of the body, but it is able to cause inestimable damage that might never be undone.

James goes on to point out, once more,

the inconsistencies of religious people:

⁹With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness.

¹⁰Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be.

¹¹Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring?

¹²My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

(James 3:9-12 NIV)

James is saying exactly the same thing Jesus said. If the tree is good, the fruit will be good. If you have a fig tree in your heart, you will get figs out of your mouth. But if you have a vine in your heart, you will never get figs out of your mouth. What comes out of your mouth indicates what is in your heart.

It is the same, he said, with the flow of water. If the water that comes out of your mouth is fresh, then the spring that is in your heart is fresh. But if the water that comes out of your mouth is salty and brackish, then the spring of your heart is salty and brackish. So that which comes out of the mouth inevitably indicates the true condition of the heart.

Chapter Four

Words Determine Destiny

The essence of the different pictures that James uses to illustrate the function of the tongue in our lives is the same: the tongue is something small in itself, but capable of causing incalculable harm if left unchecked. Of the four particular pictures that I referred to (the bit in the horse's mouth, the rudder in the ship, a spark that starts a forest fire, and a source of poison that corrupts the whole life stream), the one that best illustrates the tremendous potential of the tongue is that of the rudder in the ship.

The rudder is visually just a small

part of the ship that is down below the surface. You do not see it when you look at the ship sailing on the surface of the water. Yet that small part, which is not normally visible to the eye, determines the direction of the ship. If the rudder is used correctly, the ship will make it safely to its destined harbor. But if the rudder is misused, almost certainly the ship will suffer shipwreck. The rudder determines the course and the destiny of the entire ship.

The Bible says the tongue is like that in our bodies. When we look at people from outward appearances, normally we do not even see their tongues. Yet that small, unnoticed member is just like the rudder in the ship. The tongue's use determines the course of the person's life. It determines his or her destiny.

To continue our study, we want to consider an example from the history of Israel that drives home this lesson with inescapable clarity. The lesson to learn is this: Men determine their own destinies by the way they use their tongues.

The incident we are going to look at is

found in the book of Numbers, chapters 13 and 14. The Israelites had come out of Egypt and were on their way to the Promised Land. God arranged with Moses to send twelve men ahead of them to spy out the land: to find out its general character, the nature of the inhabitants, the kind of cities, the kind of fruit, and to bring back a report. One leader was chosen from each of the twelve tribes to go ahead into the land. They spent forty days walking through the land and then they came back with their report. The report they brought back is given to us in Numbers 13:26-28:

²⁶And they [the twelve spies] went and came to Moses, and to Aaron, and to all the congregation of the children of Israel, unto the wilderness of Paran, to Kadesh; and brought back word unto them, and unto all the congregation, and shewed them the fruit of the land.

²⁷And they told him, and said, We came unto the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this is the fruit of it. [The fruit was so heavy that it took two men to carry one bunch of grapes on a staff between them. But this is what they said next:]

²⁸Nevertheless the people be strong that dwell in the land, and the cities are walled,

and very great: and moreover we saw the children of Anak [the giants] there.

(KJV)

When God gives you a promise, are you going to accept the promise at its face value, or are you going to accept it and then say "*nevertheless*"? That was a fatal word that caused the people to be disturbed and distressed.

Two of the spies, however, Caleb and Joshua, refused to go along with this negative attitude. In Numbers 13:30-31, we read this:

³⁰And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it.

³¹But the men that went up with him said, We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we.

(KJV)

Let us take notice of the words that were used. Caleb said, "*We are well able to overcome it.*" The other ten spies said, "We be not able." One set of spies said the positive: "We are able." The other set said the negative: "We are not able." As you follow the story, you will see that each group got exactly what they said. Each

group's destiny was settled by their words.

²⁰And the LORD said, I have pardoned according to thy word:

²¹But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD.

²²Because all those men which have seen my glory, and my miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice;

²³Surely they shall not see the land which I swear unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it.

²⁴But my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land whereinto he went; and his seed shall possess it.

(Numbers 14:20-24 KJV)

By his positive confession, Caleb settled his destiny for the positive.

Numbers 14:26-32 continues:

²⁶And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying,

²⁷How long shall I bear with this evil congregation, which murmur against me? I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel, which they murmur against me.

²⁸Say unto them, As truly as I live, saith the Lord, as ye have spoken in mine ears, so will I do to you:

²⁹*Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against me,*

³⁰*Doubtless ye shall not come into the land, concerning which I swear to make you dwell therein, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun.*

³¹*But your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, them will I bring in, and they shall know the land which ye have despised.*

³²*But as for you, your carcasses, they shall fall in this wilderness.*

(KJV)

Notice the words, "As you have spoken in my ears, so will I do to you." God is saying, in effect, "You have settled what I will do to you by the words that you have spoken."

³⁶*And the men, which Moses sent to search the land, who returned, and made all the congregation to murmur against him, by bringing up a slander upon the land,*

³⁷*Even those men that did bring up the evil report upon the land, died by the plague before the LORD. [They settled their own deaths. They spoke words of death, and death was the outcome.]*

³⁸*But Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which were of the men that went to search the land, lived still*

(Numbers 14:36-38 KJV)

Death and life are in the power of the tongue. How much more clearly could that be illustrated? The men that spoke negatively settled for death. The men that spoke positively received life. They settled their own destinies by what they spoke. The ones that said, "We are not able," were not able. The ones that said, "We are able," were able.

In the New Testament, our experience as Christians is directly compared to that of Israel in the Old Testament. We are warned that the same lessons apply to us. Hebrews 4:1-2 reads:

¹Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it.

²For we also have had the gospel [the Good News] preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard it did not combine it with faith.

(NIV)

The same promise that God gave to Israel still stands for us—a promise of entering into the rest of God—but we must be careful that we do not fall short of

it in the same way that they did in the Old Testament. Their problem was they heard the message, a promise from God, but they added that one fatal word "*nevertheless.*" Instead of focusing on the promise of God and boldly confessing their faith in God's promise and power, they focused on the negative. They looked at the giants and the walled cities and said, "We are not able." Thank God for two men who had the faith and the courage to say, "*We are well able.*"

When you face God's promise concerning a certain situation, what are you going to do with your tongue? Are you going to give assent to the promise of God? Are you going to identify yourself with the promise of God and say, "God said it; I'm able." Or are you going to be one of those who say, "Nevertheless, look at all the problems. God said it, but somehow I don't feel able." Remember, just as those spies settled their destinies with their tongues by the words that they spoke, so the same lesson applies to whoever has heard the gospel. We likewise settle our destinies by the words that we speak.

Ten of the twelve spies focused on the problems, not on the promises. Two of the twelve spies, Joshua and Caleb, focused on the promises, not on the problems. Joshua and Caleb said, "*We are well able.*" The other spies said, "We are not able." Each got exactly what they said. They all settled their own destinies by the way they used their tongues.

Chapter Five

Diseases of the Tongue

We have studied an example from the Old Testament that illustrates how "*death and life are in the power of the tongue.*" We learned that the right use of the tongue will impart life, and, conversely, the wrong use will impart death.

Now we will consider certain specific diseases that affect our tongues. These six diseases that commonly infect our lives through the misuse of our tongues can, in some cases, be fatal if left unchecked.

Disease Number One: *Excessive Talking*

This disease is so common that people

accept it as normal when it is not.

*¹⁹When words are many, sin is not absent,
but he who holds his tongue is wise.*

(Proverbs 10:19 NIV)

Another version of the same Scripture verse reads:

*¹⁹When there are many words,
transgression is unavoidable, But he who
restrains his lips is wise.*

(NAS)

In other words, if you say too much, you are bound to say something wrong. There is no alternative.

We are also warned in the Bible not to use too many words toward God Himself. This is a warning that most of us really need to hear. This admonition is found in Ecclesiastes 5:1-2:

*¹Guard your steps when you go to the house
of God. Go near to listen rather than to
offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know
that they do wrong.*

*²Do not be quick with your mouth, do not
be hasty in your heart to utter anything
before God. God is in heaven and you are
on earth, so let your words be few.*

(Ecclesiastes 5:1-2 NIV)

Somebody said to me once,

"Remember, it's just as much a sin to sing a lie as it is to tell a lie." I have heard people sing hymns of total consecration and surrender to God, such as, "All to Jesus, I surrender." Then, when the offering plate comes around, they drop in a quarter. The two actions are not consistent. If you are not going to give your life to God, do not tell Him that you are surrendering all, because God is going to hold you to account for the words you speak (or sing) in His presence.

A little further on in the same chapter, the Scripture indicates that an angel records what we say when we are speaking, praying or worshiping. One day we are going to be confronted by that angel and the record of what we have said. Then, the Bible says, it will be too late to say, "I didn't really mean it," because we will be held accountable for all we have said, sung, or prayed. One day those words are going to be held up before us, and we are going to have to answer for them if we have been insincere and have not really lived according to the things we have said.

The next verse, Ecclesiastes 5:3, continues:

³As a dream comes when there are many cares, so the speech of a fool when there are many words.

(NIV)

To use too many words is the mark of a fool. The King James Version of Ecclesiastes 5:3 is even more blunt:

³For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool's voice is known by multitude of words.

(KJV)

When you hear a person continually talking, you need no other evidence: that person is a fool. "*A fool's voice is known by a multitude of words.*" What is the root problem? I believe it is restlessness. Compare that to what James says in James 3:8:

⁸No man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

(NIV)

People who are always talking are restless people, and our contemporary culture is filled with them. Have you ever been with somebody who made your head swim by all the words that came out of his

or her mouth? What is the root problem? Restlessness. Excessive talking is a sure indication of someone whose heart is not at rest.

Disease Number Two: *Idle or Careless Words*

In Matthew 12:36, Jesus says this:

³⁶"But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken."

(NIV)

One day we are going to have to answer for every word we have spoken. We are going to have to answer for words that were idle, insincere, that we did not really mean, that we were not prepared to stand behind, or that were not worked out in our lives.

In the Sermon on the Mount, recorded in Matthew 5:37, Jesus states:

³⁷"Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one."

(NIV)

That is an astonishing statement. If we say more than we mean, then the exaggeration (unnecessary emphasis or

overdoing) in our speech comes from the evil one.

Let me sum it up in just one simple word of advice. ***If you don't mean it, don't say it.*** If you will follow that one rule, I promise you, it will change your whole life. You will be a different person. If you would keep that rule for one year, I promise you that a year from now you will be a different and a much better person.

Disease Number Three: *Gossip*

¹⁶"Do not go about spreading slander among your people."

(Leviticus 19:16 NIV)

Going about spreading slander—idle, untrue, exaggerated, malicious talk—is gossip. The very title of Satan in the New Testament, the word rendered "*devil*," means "a slanderer" in Greek. That is its root meaning and the main description of Satan in the Bible. If you gossip or tell tales, you are actually doing the devil's work for him. You are a representative of Satan. Not only must we be careful not to give out gossip, we have a responsibility not to receive gossip also.

¹⁸The words of a gossip are like choice

morsels; they go down to a man's inmost parts.

(Proverbs 18:8 NIV)

How true that is of human nature. When we hear something about someone that is bad or shows them in a bad light, something in the human heart rejoices. *"The words of a gossip are like choice morsels."* Be careful when one of those choice morsels of gossip is placed in front of you that you do not swallow it. They are poisoned. They taste sweet but they poison us. And, as we receive them into our hearts, our lives will become poisoned by those morsels of gossip.

¹⁹A gossip betrays a confidence; so avoid a man who talks too much.

(Proverbs 20:19 NIV)

See how closely these various diseases are related. If you listen to a gossip, you become "an accessory after the fact." If you receive somebody who has stolen something and accept those stolen goods from them, then in legal terms you become an accessory after the fact. So, if you entertain a gossip and listen to their words, you become an accessory to the gossip. This is what God says in Psalm

15:1-3:

¹O LORD, who may abide in Thy tent? Who may dwell on Thy holy hill?

²He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness, And speaks truth in his heart.

³He does not slander with his tongue, Nor does evil to his neighbor, Nor takes up a reproach against his friend.

(NAS)

There are various requirements for access to God's presence, in order to "*dwell on His holy hill.*" We must walk with integrity; we must work righteousness; we must speak the truth in our hearts.

Then three things we must not do are listed. We must not slander with our tongues, and we must not do evil to our neighbor. Also, we must not take up a reproach, or receive a reproach, against our friends.

It is not enough that we do not slander; we must not receive the slanderer. We must not take up a reproach against someone whom we know. We must not eat those choice morsels of the gossip because they are

poison, and many relationships are poisoned by eating them.

Disease Number Four: *Lying*

We need to be careful that we use the right word to describe this disease of the tongue. Somebody has used the phrase, "evang-e-l-a-s-t-i-c-ally speaking." The evangelist sees 200 people come forward in his crusade and by the time the report is in his newsletter, it is 500. What is that—exaggeration or lying? It is really lying. I do not mention this to be critical of others. It is important that every one of us be very careful that we are not found guilty of lying.

In Proverbs 6:16-19, the writer tells of seven things that the Lord hates. Hate is a very strong word. This is what it says:

*¹⁶There are six things the LORD hates,
seven that are detestable to him:*

*¹⁷ haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that
shed innocent blood,*

*¹⁸ a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet
that are quick to rush into evil,*

*¹⁹ a false witness who pours out lies and a
man who stirs up dissension among
brothers.*

(NIV)

Out of those seven specific things that the Lord hates, there are three that are related to the tongue: first, *"a lying tongue"*; second, *"a false witness"* (obviously that affects the tongue also); third, *"a man who stirs up dissension among brothers"* (and normally the way that dissension is stirred up is by words). So out of seven things that the Lord hates, there are three that affect the tongue, and of those three, two are specifically connected with lying. This is stated again in Proverbs 12:22:

²²The LORD detests lying lips, but he delights in men who are truthful.

(NIV)

In that verse we have two sets of opposites. We have the word "detest" and the word "delight." *"The Lord detests lying lips ...he delights in men who are truthful."* There is nothing in between.

Then we have the other two opposites, "lying" and "truthful." Again, there is nothing in between. If it is not truthful, it is a lie. If it is a lie, the Lord detests it. If it is truthful, the Lord delights in it.

Our problem is that we have so many