



by Patti Gallagher Mansfield

You've probably heard the joke about the three fastest means of communication: telegraph, telephone and tella-woman! While we women might wince, we've got to admit that most of us do like to talk. My husband is

forever amazed at how much time my friends and I can spend in conversation.

If you're like me, you've probably come to realize the truth of this verse from Proverbs, "Where talk is plentiful, sin is not wanting." Somehow, the more we say, the more occasions there are to offend in the area of speech. Because a well-guarded tongue is so crucial to our Christian witness, I've reflected on what we can do to tame our tongues. The following are some points I've gleaned from the Scripture that I'm working on. Perhaps they may help you.

### **Believe in the Transforming Power of The Holy Spirit.**

Years ago, I invited a former drug addict from Teen Challenge to speak to my high school students about Christ. After the first class it was clear the speaker needed a microphone because she was so soft-spoken. The woman shook her head in amusement. "I had

one of the loudest, coarsest mouths you can imagine. The fact that these girls can't hear me without a microphone gives testimony to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit." What the Spirit has done for her, He can do for us as well. If we turn to the Lord, admitting our need for help in using our tongues rightly, He will not fail

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us. Repentance and faith always unleash the transforming power of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

**Daily Prayer and Scripture Reading.** We must present ourselves to the Lord, submit to Him, and grow in union with Him. This doesn't mean we won't fall through our words, perhaps many times a day. But when we're growing in union with the Lord, at least we know we're falling. Without prayer, we might not even realize our shortcomings in the area of speech. The more we pray and read His word, the more we're attuned to the convicting power of the Holy Spirit. We can identify speech patterns that need to change.

Get familiar with the teaching of Scripture on proper use of the tongue. One of my dear friends made a file of index cards with individual quotes from Scripture concerning speech. Each day she placed a new quote on the windowsill above her sink. While at work she meditated on God's word. "Say nothing harmful small or great" (Sir 6: 1) is one I remember seeing there. No wonder her speech is so gracious!

**Guard Your Minds and Hearts.** St. Paul says, "Take every thought captive to Christ" (2 Cor 10.5). What comes out of our mouths has first been born in our hearts and pondered in our minds before it's expressed. Learn to nip those critical, unloving, sinful thoughts in the bud before they go from your heart into your mind and out of your lips.

**"Never let evil talk pass from your lips. Say only the good things men need to hear, things that will really help them. Do nothing to sadden the Holy Spirit with whom you were sealed against the day of redemption."**

**Make a Commitment to Positive Speech.** Years ago my husband and I agreed to compliment each other at least once a day. At first it was awkward and we'd joke about saying three positive things on

Wednesday so we'd be caught up on compliments until the weekend! But after the initial embarrassment, we both began to see the good fruit in our lives. Now positive speech about each other is so natural, we need few reminders. Look for opportunities to say good things to one another - on birthdays, anniversaries, and holidays. Make a commitment to it, and I guarantee you'll see results.

**Never Repeat Gossip.** Don't even repeat "charismatic gossip." Do you know what that is? The phone rings and you say, "Now, don't tell this to anybody. I wouldn't even share this with you except for prayer, but did you hear about. . ." Much gossip can be cloaked in prayer requests. We need to examine our hearts before the Lord. In Sirach we read, "Let anything you hear die within you. Be assured, it will not make you burst. When a fool hears something, he is in labor, like a woman giving birth to a child" (Sir 19:9-10). Let's learn to let certain things die within us.

**Replace Grumbling with Gratitude.** "Dedicate yourselves to thankfulness" (Col 3:15). That implies a firm decision to give thanks always and for everything. Here's one I need to work on continually. When our water faucet broke I left my husband a note which read, "Faucet broken. In everything give thanks!" We need to encourage one another in our families and communities to give thanks instead of gripe.

**Say Only What Helps.** In Ephesians 4:29-30 we read, "Never let evil talk pass from your lips. Say only the good things men need to hear, things that will really help them. Do nothing to sadden the Holy Spirit with whom you were sealed against the day of redemption." One night I walked into our prayer meeting, and in the course of a conversation I said something which, while true, was totally unnecessary. It put a certain group of people in a bad light. By the time I walked up to my seat, I knew that I had

saddened the Holy Spirit. I apologized to the Lord and to my friends. What I said didn't really help. So ask yourself, "Will this really help?" If not, don't say it.

**Make a Regular Examination of Conscience about Speech.**

Am I using my tongue to glorify God and to build up my brothers and sisters, especially those who are closest to me? Or am I using my tongue to worship the Lord in one breath and in the next to injure the Body of Christ?

I pray that the following verse from Proverbs 31 may take on flesh in me as I yield to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. "The teaching of kindness is on her tongue." May this be true in your life as well.