

**Series: Making Life Work in a Screwed Up World - August 7, 2011**

**ME AND MY BIG MOUTH!  
Proverbs 10:11-14; 18:7, 21  
Speaker: Ken Davis**

1. How many of you found that your 16<sup>th</sup> birthday was one of the milestones in your life? Why? I can't remember a **whole** lot about it—except that I could now get a **driver's license!** Now, it takes a **lot** more to get a driver's license, it seems. And it makes **sense** doesn't it—to have to take classes, pass tests and actually be **able** to drive! Driving a car can be a life and death thing!

-And now you have to pass a test and have a license to drive a boat—mainly because kids were driving jet-skis which can travel at 60 mph. or more! Jet-skis and boats can be dangerous! If you want to own a gun or go hunting you have to take safety classes, pass tests—and get a **license**—because guns are dangerous!

-But there's a force in this world that is even **more** dangerous than cars, boats or guns because it can affect the body **and** the soul. And every human being has been issued one. It's called a **mouth!** Wouldn't it be interesting if everyone had to have a license to use it? You know, where there were classes, instructors, coaches, exams—and if you misused it, your license could be suspended?

- a. Proverbs, this book of amazing wisdom, tells us something we already know from experience—that the mouth is a force to be reckoned with. I was **amazed** when I read through Proverbs and saw how **much** was devoted to how we use our mouths. Let me read two verses that summarize what it says:

**The mouth of a good person is a deep, life-giving well, but the mouth of a wicked person is a dark cave of abuse. (Proverbs 10:11 MSG)**

And then these amazing words:

**Fools are undone by their big mouths: their souls are crushed by their word...words kill, words give life; they're either poison or fruit—you choose! (Proverbs 18:7, 21)**

- b. Words kill...words give life. Has anyone besides me ever inwardly groaned, "Oh no! **Me and my BIG MOUTH!**" Our mouths are **trouble!** With just a few words, we can step on someone's heart, crush their spirit and wound their soul. With our mouths, we dig graves for relationships, jobs, the reputations of others and, eventually, our own happiness.

-But it **can** be different! Words **can** heal. The right words can help others to not feel alone; they can give hope to people who have given up. Words can inspire; they can keep people from disastrous decisions. Words really **do** have the power life and death—and **that's** why the God's wisdom says, "Use your words sparingly, carefully, and wisely!"

2. As you know, the mouth itself is not really the problem. I mean, speech is an **amazing** gift—but it's really just a sound system for something Jesus identifies as the **heart**:

**“For whatever is in your heart determines what you say. A good person produces good words from a good heart, and an evil person produces evil words from an evil heart. And I tell you this, that you must give an account on judgment day of every idle word you speak. The words you say now reflect your fate then; either you will be justified by them or you will be condemned.” (Matthew 12:34b-37 NLT)**

-Like anything powerful—fire, atomic energy or sex—speech can be misused. So I have some props to illustrate how speech gets misused.

- a. Anyone know what this is? I've used it before. It's a genuine blowgun, made by the Waodani Tribe in the Amazon—the one featured in the film, ***The End of the Spear***. It shoots these little wooden darts. By themselves—it would be hard to take anything down with one. Know what makes them lethal? It's the poison they're dipped in—made from the skin of innocent looking little tree frogs in the Amazon. Get stuck with one of these babies and you're in a heap of trouble!

-Anyone here who's ever gotten hit with a sharp word that's been dipped in the poison of hatred, jealousy or contempt? It **hurts!** Words can be deadly! Proverbs says:

**Liars secretly hoard hatred; fools openly spread slander.**  
(Proverbs 10:18 MSG)

**Liars hate their victims...**  
(Proverbs 26:28 MSG)

**Mean-spirited slander is heartless...**  
(Proverbs 11:12 MSG)

**Mean people spread gossip; their words smart and burn.**  
(Proverbs 16:27 MSG)

-The adjectives used to describe people who inflict pain or destroy reputations with their words are not flattering. The Spirit calls us **liars. Fools. Mean-spirited. Heartless.**

-Just for the record, does everyone here know what know what **slander** is? Slander is spreading false or misleading information about someone behind their back and hurting their reputation. **Gossip** is confessing someone else's sins—**to others**--usually for the sake of making yourself look better or bigger than them. And it's wrong.

-It's wrong because the source is wrong. It comes from a poisoned heart. Many times we hurt, or feel small—and something dark in us wants to inflict some pain, make something die. The Bible says that if you say you love God but hate another person--you're a liar--you can't do both.

- b. Another misuse of the mouth could be illustrated by this **thermostat**. Anyone know what a thermostat is? It's a switch activated by a thermometer. When the temperature goes up, the switch is activated—and something like an oven or furnace turns on or turns off.

-I've noticed that sometimes my mouth is activated by my inner **temper**—ature? Can anyone relate? As my temperature rises, my mouth tends to open—and the chances of someone getting burned are pretty high! The Bible is very clear on this stuff. Proverbs says:

**Slowness to anger makes for deep understanding; a quick-tempered person stockpiles stupidity. (Proverbs 14:29 MSG)**

-Proverbs says that a hot-tempered person is a fool—and that smart people stay away from them. Can anyone guess why that would be a good idea?

-Here's what I find amazing. I've watched people lose their temper—and just totally cut loose; when they're done, it's like a scene from CSI. There's relational blood everywhere—people in various stages of death groaning. Then the person who just vented says something brilliant like, "Well, I was just upset--it was the wrong time of the month... I've had a bad day--blah, blah, blah." Second degree murder isn't as bad as first degree murder—but it's **still** a felony—and the victim is **still** dead!

-God's Word doesn't pull any punches; it says:

**...A quick-tempered person stockpiles stupidity. (Proverbs 14:29 MSG)**

Think about that. "What are you saving? What do you have in your warehouse?" "Oh, stupidity, mainly!" What comes out of our mouths when we get bumped or jostled basically reveals what's in the warehouse, right? Jesus called it, **the contents of our hearts**.

- c. The mouth can also be misused as a **laundry chute**. When our son Matt was about 6, he saw the movie, **Dunston Checks In** and became fascinated with laundry chutes. In fact, we were horrified to find out that when he visited a friend after church one Sunday, he took a ride down their laundry chute. The kid had a **death wish!** Laundry chutes are cool. Open the lid, throw in the stuff, and it free-falls right into the laundry room. I couldn't bring a laundry chute, so I brought some dirty laundry.

-Some people apparently have no filter between their brain and their mouth. What pops into their head falls right through their mouth! Proverbs says:

**Careful words make for a careful life; careless talk may ruin everything. (Proverbs 13:3 MSG)**

-In college, we used to pull a gag at the dining hall by loosening the cap on the saltshaker. When a friend would go to put salt on their food—all the salt would dump out and ruin their meal. Wisdom in learning to **think** before you **talk**. Proverbs goes on to say:

**Observe people who always talk before they think--even simpletons are better off than they are. (Proverbs 29:20 MSG)**

-The intent here, friends, is not shame. God is saying, "I know you! I know how desperately you want friends who respect you; who listen to you—want to be around you and will confide in you. If that's going to happen, you have **got** to install some filters between your brain and your mouth! Think! Control your mouth or you'll run off every single friend you have!"

- d. Fourth category of problem. Some people's mouths are like this **mixer**--always stirring things up. Someone makes a comment—they argue. They always know more than anyone else. They talk down to others like they're idiots. They're **always** right. They say insulting things. I mean, in any given conversation, they **just can't resist** throwing the last knife.

-Listen as I read through a collage of what Proverbs has to say about this:

**Arrogant know-it-alls stir up discord; wise men and women *listen* to each other's counsel. (Proverbs 13:10 MSG)**

**A gentle response defuses anger; a sharp tongue kindles a temper-fire. (Proverbs 15:1 MSG)**

**The words of a fool start fights; do him a favor and gag him. (Proverbs 18:6 MSG)**

**A quarrelsome person in a dispute is like kerosene thrown on a fire. (Proverbs 26:21 MSG)**

I once heard a leader other leaders; "When you step into a heated situation, you always carry two buckets—one filled water and one filled with gas. When you're done—everyone knows which one you threw!"

-Now, here's the question; why would we start an argument? Well, at the root is something God' can't stand. **Pride!** The need to be right. For some people—this need is more important than anything else. Marriage. Job. Friendships. **Anything!**

-Jesus blessed the **peacemakers**. The **meek**. People who don't need to be right or to retaliate. God's wisdom says, "Why don't you try a gentle answer—and see if things calm down? Why choose chose—when you **could** choose peace? Try saying "I **could** be **wrong!**" It ultimately makes more sense to humble **yourself**—rather than **be** humbled!

3. In his book, **The Life You've Always Wanted**, John Ortberg tells the story of sitting in the lobby of a university with his family when a woman—a total stranger—walked in with her little boy and just started talking. It was like someone had pulled a plug. She talked, and talked, and talked—told them about her relatives, their home, their children--she told them things they didn't **want** to know. **Finally**, at the end of 1 ½ hours of verbal diarrhea, she stopped, looked at her watch and said, "Oh, I've got to go and buy some buttons for my daughter's dress, see ya." At that point, her son, who had been totally silent up to this point, said, "Mom, you need a button for your **mouth**."

a. Sometimes I need a button for **my** mouth! As a teen, I sometimes used to leave parties and think about how much I talked and tried to make people laugh. I'd feel stupid—and ask, "Why do I have to talk so much?" I realize now—I was practicing for **this!** And some of you are saying, "Ken—you don't need a button for your mouth—you need a **muzzle!**"

-Sometimes after being in meetings—or meeting with people—I **still** ask, "Why didn't you just shut up? What were you trying to prove? Why did you have to say **that?** I have learned a few things. For example, everything I think isn't worth saying! Everything I know isn't worth sharing! Proverbs actually says this:

**Even fools are thought wise when they keep silent; with their mouths shut, they seem intelligent. (Proverbs 17:28 NLT)**

I.e.—shut up! People will think you're smart!

b. If you have trouble holding your tongue, you need to know, first of all, that you've got company. **Lots** of it. Everybody---**everybody**—struggles! Also, you can't change by trying harder; you'll have to do some retraining. By getting feedback. By allowing others to help. There are some great questions you can use as filters before you pull the cord and start your mouth:

**\*Is what I'm about to say going to help or not?**

**\*I think it's true--but is in *in fact* true?**

**\*Why am I saying this? Am I trying to appear clever—or smarter—or better than I am?**

**\*Am I saying this to make someone else look bad--at least, worse than me?**

**\*Is this a joke at someone else's expense?**

**\*Am I trying to inflict pain?**

**\*Will this build up or tear down?**

**\*Will I be embarrassed if what I'm about to say gets quoted at a different time and place?**

**\*Am I angry, over-tired, or upset?**

-There's a story in the Old Testament about a man named Nehemiah who was the cup-bearer for Artaxerxes, king of Persia. He'd gotten some bad news—that the work had stalled out on rebuilding Jerusalem, the city he loved. He was devastated—but the problem was that to be sad in front of the king was a capital offense! Artaxerxes asked what was wrong. Nehemiah's next words were some of the most important in his life. Listen to how the text puts it:

**With a prayer to the God of heaven, I replied... (Nehemiah 2:4b-5a NLT)**

-There have been a number of times in my life—especially when I'm dealing with a crisis situation—and, a split second before I respond, I shoot a pray up that goes something like this: **PLEASE HELP!** Here's my challenge. Before you speak—why not pray? We're told that if we **ever** lack wisdom—to ask for it—and God will give it. The way I see it—we will either pray **before**—or after. "Oh God, what did I say something so stupid?" I'd say praying before is better! It's a kind of **time delay** thing—and powerful!

- c. Know what the biggest temptation is right now for both you and me? To think, "Boy, I wish \_\_\_\_\_ could hear this!" In other words--to deny, blame--do **anything** except say, "I think I'm a little loose in the turns when it comes to my mouth!" How many of you would consider yourself at least somewhat courageous? Raise you hands high? So. Ask a close friend who will be **really** honest with you, "Tell me the truth—what's it like to stand in front of my mouth? **Help me!**"

4. The **best** news I can give myself—and you—is that our words can make a **huge** difference in the lives of others...for **good!** What I say and what **you** say can give **build** friends—and **build** our reputations. You've heard about misusing our words; here's a taste of what it says about using our words wisely.

**Well-spoken words bring satisfaction; well-done work has its own reward.**  
(Proverbs 12:14 MSG)

**Worry weighs us down; a cheerful word picks us up. (Proverbs 12:25 MSG)**  
**Congenial conversation--what a pleasure! The right word at the right time - beautiful! (Proverbs 15:23 MSG)**

**A wise person gets known for his insight; gracious words add to one's reputation. (Proverbs 16:21 MSG)**

-Words are like tools—you use different words for different things. Mechanics use wrenches. Craftsmen use saws. Surgeons use scalpels. You don't want to get them mixed up. Can you imagine a surgeon chasing a patient around the OR with a hammer saying, "**But I want to fix your brain!**" Use words carefully. If you need to, sit down and write out what you want to say.

-Something else needs to happen; your mouth needs to be wired to your ears. In other words—**listen carefully!** Ever talked to someone—and you get the feeling that they're not listening—they're just waiting politely to speak? Proverbs says, quite bluntly:

**Answering before listening is both stupid and rude. (Proverbs 18:13 MSG)**

-The NT author, James, puts it like this:

**My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry. (James 1:18 TNIV)**

-Let's do a test on this: Quick to...? Slow to...?

Now, there's a sort of genius in this. First, listening to others helps them **want** to listen to you; it also gives you time to **think** before you **talk**. And when you listen, you learn. You can respond more intelligently. And when you listen you talk less—and your chances of sinning go way down. Think I'm kidding?

Listen:

**When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise. (Proverbs 10:19 NIV)**

a. Just a note on listening; you need to **filter** what you listen to.

**The gullible believe anything they're told; the prudent sift and weigh. (Proverbs 14:15 MSG)**

Be smart. Don't believe everything you hear. You also have to filter out the junk.

**Listening to gossip is like eating cheap candy; do you really want that junk in your belly? (Proverbs 18:8 MSG)**

And the Bible tells us **why** we listen to gossip! It's not pretty! Want to hear what it says?

**Evil people relish malicious conversation; ears of liars itch for dirty gossip! (Proverbs 17:4 MSG)**

When it comes to gossip and slander and criticism, I've seen so many people feign innocence on this; "I don't know **why** people come to **me** with this stuff? What could I do?" Proverbs says, "They deliver it because you **like** it! You gobble it down like candy!" So, I want to give you permission this morning for something. When someone backs up the garbage truck to your door—loaded up with slander, gossip—and criticism—**beep! Beep! Beep!**—to put up your

hand and say, “Not on my front lawn!” Know why? Because that stuff goes into your heart—and it’s from the overflow of the heart that your tongue speaks.

-The best visual I could think of is an **oil lamp**. Your tongue is like a wick in a lamp. The wick itself is quite neutral. It’s what the wick’s **dipped** in that matters. You have to be really, **really** careful what you put in your heart.

-One of the reasons why it’s so important to invited Jesus Christ into the core of your life is because He’s the only One I know of who, if He has our cooperation, can take a gossiping, slandering, angry heart, change it, and fill it with good things like love, kindness, goodness, patience and self-control. But for Him to do that, we have to see the problem, own it—and ask for help. Have you ever done that?

- b. Second observation. As I have already said, speech is **powerful**. It can do a **lot** of good, or it can do a **lot** of damage.

**Words kill, words give life; they’re either poison or fruit—you choose.  
(Proverbs 18:21 MSG)**

-This, friends, is **not** a random phrase that some author threw into the book to add some weight to what he said. This is the message of Proverbs; it’s the message of Jesus—it’s right, it’s true, and it’s eternal. Your life will be weighted by your speech--toward blessing or disaster—one word at a time. One day I will have to account for my works—and so will you. Think about it. Over a lifetime, the average person says enough to fill a library with 10,000 of **these**—a 300 page book! It’s like there’s this watershed point—and what you say determines the direction of your life. Whether your life will flow toward love, joy, great relationships—really making a difference—or to a far different ocean. A place you don’t want to be.

-So, **do the work of figuring out which direction yours is headed in!** Ask for help. Let others tell you how you come across—and have the humility to learn!

- c. Based on all this, there's a third observation. Your mouth will either make you a good friend, a great parent, a great in-law and a loving spouse--or it'll leave you a crabby, old lonely person at the end of your life. See, the deal is that we **have** freedom of speech! You **can** say whatever you want! But is it worth it? Do you want friends? Do you want to leave behind a legacy--and wind up with God's smile over your life? **Watch your words; clean out your heart!**
- d. Fourth observation, if people are getting hurt by what you say or how you say it, you may have a bunch of anger inside. There are lumps of it floating around in you--kinda like land mine that will blow up and maim someone if it gets bumped. It might really help you and help those around you to see a good Christian counselor and find out **why** it’s there. If you deal with it—you’ll be glad you did.

- e. Some of you may be saying to yourselves, “Yeah, well there goes Ken again with his dumb little props—the blowgun, the thermostat, the mixer, the laundry and the lamp. Geesh! Does he think we’re all idiots?”

-Friends, next month I’ll have been a pastor for 32 years and I just need to say—I’m not sure what else to do! Honestly, I can’t say I’ve seen a **lot** of Christ-followers who **get** it—who understand how destructive gossip and slander and nasty words are—and how it grieves God and hurts the church. I don’t think we have **any** idea of the power of what wholesome, healing, loving and encouraging words can do for people who live in a damaged, damaging world.

-My prayer for The Olive Branch—and beyond—is that we will not just talk about Jesus and do good things—but that we will be **different**. That, as Jesus prayed, **we** will be known by our love; by the gracious, kind and generous way we treat other’s lives and hearts. Can we agree on that? Jesus said, **“On the last day, your words will either acquit you or condemn you.”**

## Q & A

5. One proverb I absolutely **love** says this:

**A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver.  
(Proverbs 25:11 NIV)**

To illustrate this, I want to close with a great story about how words can bring life. Ken Blanchard and Barbara Glanz—both corporate consultants and authors—tell the story of a guy named Johnny the Bagger.

-Barbara is a motivational speaker for people who work with customers on the front lines in the service industry. She did seminar once talking about the power of words; how every interaction we have with another person is the chance to change someone’s day, to create a memory--a chance to bless somebody’s life. At her conference, she plastered words, great saying, and images all over the walls. She said, “You can change someone’s life!” Then she writes:

**About a month later I got a call from a front line customer contact person a 19-year-old bagger named Johnny. The caller, who proudly informed me that he had Downs Syndrome, told me his story: Barbara, I liked what you talked about but I didn’t think I could do anything special for our customers, after all, I’m just a bagger. Then he had an idea. He decided every night when he came home from work he would find a really good thought for the day—for the next day. If he couldn’t find one someplace, he would make one up. Then every night he and his dad would sit down by the computer and his dad would help him enter the saying six times a page on a computer and then Johnny would sit there and print off 50 pages. Then he would take a pair of scissors and cut off 300 copies and then he would sign his name to every one of them. Then he would put the**

**stack of them next to him while he worked the next day and every time he finished bagging someone's groceries, he would put his saying on top of the last bag. Then he would stop and he would look the person in the eye and say: "I put a great saying in your bag. I hope it helps you have a good day. Thanks for coming in!" That was Johnny the Bagger.**

A month later Barbara got a call from the store manager where Johnny works who said: "Barbara, you won't believe what's happened here. I was making my rounds. When I got to the cashier lines, the line at Johnny's checkout was three times longer than anybody else's. It went all the way down the frozen foods aisle. So I got on the loud speaker to get more checkout lines open, but they wouldn't move out of Johnny's line. They all said: *That's okay, we'll wait. We want to be in Johnny's line.*"

-One woman came up to him, grabbed his hand: "I used to shop in your store once a week, now I come in every time I go by because I want to see Johnny. I want to get Johnny's thought for the day."

-Do you know who the most important person in that store is? It's Johnny the Bagger. He's not at the top of the Org Chart. He is for sure not making the most money. He's the most important person in that store.

-A few months later the manager called Barbara back. He said: "Barbara, you're not going to believe this, Johnny is transforming our store. When the Floral Department has a broken flower or an unused corsage, they used to just throw it away. Now they go out into the aisles and they find an elderly woman or a little girl and they pin it on them. The guys who make our shopping carts are working on wheels that actually work. The whole culture of the store is being changed."

-I will tell you why Ken Blanchard was so excited about this story. Over the last ten years of his life, Ken has become a fully devoted follower of Jesus. And this picture is a picture of the kind of thing Jesus does through people. Ordinary people—just like you and me—when we understand the **power** of our words. A word aptly spoken—is like apples of gold in settings of silver. Words can kill—but words can **also** bring life. So. Let's bring life!

6. The most gracious person who has ever lived has made this incredible offer to you and me--that if we will give Him our mouths--and the heart--the container this little wick is dipped in--He would fill the container with something worth dipping in. Himself. His love and grace and joy. He's waiting for people like you and me to take Him up on His offer.