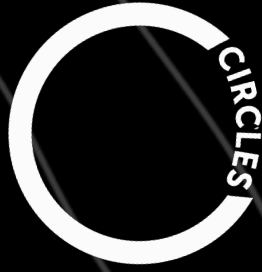


**THE POWER  
OF YOUR WORDS**



### CIRCLE 01/04: **THE POWER OF WORDS**

I used to work as a summer camp counselor. This job was exhausting, exciting, and... sticky. For some reason, in a room full of children, every square inch of space develops a sticky film that requires rigorous scrubbing to remove. Due to the stickiness of our campers, we were always leading long lines of children to the restroom to wash the Kool-aid or snow cone syrup off their hands. One August morning, I was walking down a cracked sidewalk with a four-year-old kid named Brian. We strolled silently for the most part until he broke the quiet by saying, “Mr. Jack, you remind me of the circus.” I laughed and replied, “Thank you! Is it because you think I am funny or entertaining?” He quickly snapped, “No, you just look like a tent.”

That was rude, Brian.

Those words stuck with me. I know it’s silly, but that four-year-old hurt my feelings with his little comment. I’ve heard it said, “Sticks and stones may break our bones, but words can never hurt me.” This cliché statement lies. Sure, it rhymes, but it’s not true. Sticks and stones bring temporary pain, but words can hurt for a lifetime. Words can hurt us. Words can haunt us. Words can replay repeatedly in our heads. Words can lead us to dark places. Words can change the direction of our lives. Sticks and stones can break bones, but words can break hearts.

### **READ: Proverbs 12:18**

“The words of the reckless pierce like swords, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.”

Proverbs represents a genre of ancient writing called “wisdom literature.” This book compiles good advice and wise sayings designed to help people live a better life. The authors of Proverbs leverage poetic language to enhance our lives in practical ways. The rich language is packed with contrast and juxtaposition— the fool versus the wise, the hardworking versus the lazy, and the godly versus the ungodly. When you are reading wisdom literature, always ask yourself, “How does this language align with my lifestyle? Am I being foolish or wise?”

In chapter 12, Solomon uses contrasting language to reveal the critical principle that your words are powerful. Wise people take their speech seriously because words can be a weapon or medicine, hurting or healing.

Everything you say or post has tremendous power. Professional counselors spend countless hours recounting the hurtful words that changed someone's life. Unfortunately, many people have heard words that wounded like weapons. "I hate you." "You are a disappointment." "You ruin everything." "I don't love you anymore." Weaponized words can do serious damage to someone. This trauma can cultivate long-lasting heartbreak that makes kind words difficult to accept. Wounded people often struggle to believe it when someone says, "I am happy you're here," "You are special," or even "I love you."

How do we protect people from this kind of hurt? We must actively apply a filter to our words. Just like a water filter purifies our drinking water, we must filter the phrases we share. Before you say something, ask, "Does this hurt or heal?" One healing phrase can change someone's entire day.

"I am happy that you're my friend."

"Your input is so good."

"You're beautiful."

"I appreciate you"

Throw around kind words like confetti. Share words that heal. Your kind words can bring comfort to the crushed, healing to the hurting, and worth to those feeling worthless. Mother Teresa famously said, "Kind words can be short, but their echoes are endless."

Your words can either hurt or heal. Ensure your words heal.  
Freedom is found in the fullness of God's presence.

## **TALK IT OUT**

*Go through these questions with your circle. Be honest. Be open. Talk through the tough stuff.*

Q1: What's the funniest phrase you've heard from a little kid?

Q2: Think of a time someone spoke something kind to you. How did that affect you?

Q3: Think of a time someone said something unkind to you. How did that affect you?

Q4: How can we unintentionally speak words that harm instead of heal? What can we do to prevent unintentionally hurting someone with our words?

Q5: How can you carefully filter what words you choose to speak?

Q6: Choose one person you'd like to intentionally build up every day this week with your words. How can you improve his or her day with your words?

## **READING PLAN**

*READ THESE PASSAGES IN ORDER EVERY DAY*

**READ THESE PASSAGES IN ORDER EVERY DAY**

Micah 6:8

Matthew 5:44

Romans 13:8

1 Peter 4:8

1 Corinthians 2:9

John 13:34

1 Corinthians 13:1

Do the following with each passage:

**ASK**– God to connect with you here. In prayer, start by slowing down and inviting God to be present. Begin with focus and openness to see what God has for you today.

**READ**– the selected section of Scripture slowly. Take note of the words and phrases that intrigue you, reading them a second time if necessary.

**REFLECT**– on what grabs you. How does this passage personally relate to your own life and experiences?

**RESPOND**– to the Scripture. Speak directly to God about what's on your mind and heart. Look for ways to live out what you've uncovered.

## CIRCLE 02/04: **WHY DO YOU LIE?**

“I love that band!” I interjected while dipping a tortilla chip into some guacamole. After church, my friends gathered around three tables we’d pushed together at a Mexican restaurant. We were discussing our favorite songs and albums. Someone mentioned a musical group that I was vaguely familiar with. I ended up professing my love for their music. Keep in mind, I had never even heard a song by them. My desire to fit in led me to lie. With excitement in her voice, my friend asked, “Oh! What is your favorite song?” I stuttered and said something like, “You know the one. The one with the guitars and stuff.”

The cat was out of the bag. I told a lie. Not only was I lying, but I was also lying about something stupid. When you lie, it’s beneficial to determine the why behind your lie. My deception was evidence of my insecurity. I wanted to fit in, so I said something untrue in order to win the approval of my friends. However, it backfired when I was caught in my fib.

People have a propensity for lying. This is evident in the lives of children. They claim they cleaned their room when they really just pushed the mess under the bed. They blame their sibling for the broken window when they were actually the culprit. They say they completed their homework when their binder is full of empty worksheets. They lie while sitting on Santa’s lap by claiming they’ve been good when they really cut their dog’s hair earlier that week. The white lies of childhood feel silly now, but lying is a dangerous habit that can wreak havoc on your life.

READ: Proverbs 12:22-23

“The Lord detests lying lips, but he delights in those who tell the truth. The wise don’t make a show of their knowledge, but fools broadcast their foolishness.”

When you study Proverbs 12, the sentences seem disorganized as if Solomon randomly jumps from thought to thought. If a student submitted Proverbs to an English teacher, he’d likely get a D. There is no thesis, no theme, and there are no transitions. While it seems scattered, this is common in ancient wisdom literature. These proverbs probably weren’t written together like an essay. Instead, they were compiled as a collection. This book represents a collection of short sayings that speak to the risk of bad character and the reward of good character. As Solomon parallels the foolish and the wise, he acknowledges a common character trait of fools: they lie.

We often disguise our falsehoods. Most people would never confess to being a liar. However, they may say things they don’t truly mean. People exaggerate or elaborate to make themselves look good. They might pretend to be someone they’re not. People can say something with their lips while doing something different with their life. These examples may seem innocent, but they can destroy other’s trust in you. Lying can crush relationships, make your life difficult, and lead to an identity crisis.

Build your life on honesty and integrity. Truth is not just important to God. Honesty is God’s identity (Psalm 31:5). If we want to be more like Jesus, honesty is essential.

Jesus even refers to Himself as the truth (John 14:6). Honesty is foundational to God's character, so it's also foundational to our behavior.

The truth isn't just holy; it's also helpful. Think about it. Truth produces trust. If you always tell the truth, then you don't have to work on keeping your story straight. If someone lies to you about something minor, what's to say they won't deceive you about something major? One lie can make *all* your truths questionable. When you get caught in a lie, it will ultimately damage your trustworthiness. Telling the truth reveals your reliability.

Honesty really is the best policy. Commit to a life of honesty and integrity.

## TALK IT OUT

*Go through these questions with your circle. Be honest. Be open. Talk through the tough stuff.*

Q1: What's the silliest lie you've ever told? Why do you think you said that?

Q2: How do people often justify lying?

Q3: How can a "white lie" quickly become something that impacts your life and your relationships?

Q4: Why is truthfulness so important to God?

Q5: What can you do if you're in a situation that you've been lying about?

Q6: What can you do moving forward to speak only the truth?

## READING PLAN

*READ THESE PASSAGES IN ORDER EVERY DAY*

1 John 3:18

Proverbs 10:12

John 15:12

Proverbs 1:8-9

1 Corinthians 15:33

Proverbs 7:1-5

Philippians 4:8-9

Do the following with each passage:

**ASK**– God to connect with you here. In prayer, start by slowing down and inviting God to be present. Begin with focus and openness to see what God has for you today.

**READ**– the selected section of Scripture slowly. Take note of the words and phrases that intrigue you, reading them a second time if necessary.

**REFLECT**– on what grabs you. How does this passage personally relate to your own life and experiences?

**RESPOND**– to the Scripture. Speak directly to God about what's on your mind and heart. Look for ways to live out what you've uncovered.

### CIRCLE 03/04: **GOSSIP: LITTLE MORSELS**

“Spill the tea,” I heard a student petition while I was handing out mid-term project assignments. The class erupted into whispers and laughter. Here is “the tea.” Apparently, a long-term couple in another class was having minor relational problems. (Long-term for eleventh grade, so it was like three months.) That’s it. If you ask me, it wasn’t all that interesting, especially compared to the presentation I had prepared on religious literature. This sort of event was normal during my time as a high school teacher. Those kids were obsessed with gossip. One school-wide secret could derail an entire lecture.

We hear it all the time. “Did you hear about Angela?” “Can you believe what Adam was doing this weekend?” “Did you know that her parents just split up?” “Elvis is actually alive and living in Barbados.” While gossip seems silly, there is also something addicting about it. Drama is literally like a drug releasing dopamine in our brains. There is something exhilarating and intoxicating about being in the loop and knowing something that you shouldn’t.

Let’s cut to the chase. Gossip hurts people. It hurts both the person you gossip about and the person that shares it. When Solomon was writing down his little wisdom nuggets in Proverbs, he mentioned gossip dozens of times. To slam a serious stamp on the topic, he listed it as one of the seven deadly sins (Proverbs 6). Why would God want gossip to be on the same list as murder? Because gossip is toxic. It has the power to destroy friendships, families, and even churches.

#### **READ: Proverbs 18:8**

“Rumors are dainty morsels that sink deep into one’s heart.”

Solomon suggests that gossip is like a “dainty morsel.” Think of this chatter like a cute sweet treat that’s both tasty and bad for your health. Imagine gossip like a box of eye-catching chocolates where each piece is packed with poison. They are appealing to the eyes and sweet on the tongue, but hurtful to your heart. It looks delightful, but it’s actually destructive.

Selfishness is like the sweet nougat center of gossip. Discussing someone else’s problems and shortcomings makes us feel better about ourselves. Gossip serves a quick fix for our desire to feel superior. We must drop this harmful habit. You will never raise yourself up by bringing someone else down. Discussing someone’s weakness doesn’t make you stronger. The opposite is true. Giving up gossip reveals strength.

“But I am not gossiping if it’s true!” People spout off statements like this to get themselves off the hook. However, gossip is not the same as lying. You are still gossiping if every single sentence is true. If it doesn’t involve you, then you shouldn’t share it. Voltaire, a French writer and historian, elaborated on this by saying, “Everything that is said should be true, but not everything true should be said.”



Ask yourself these two questions to guard yourself from gossip:

**Does this concern me?**

The danger of gossip is that you insert yourself into a situation where you aren't part of the problem or the solution. If it's not a situation you're in, then it's not your story to tell. Simple as that. Don't talk about something that does not involve you. This will protect you from the pitfalls of gossip.

**Have you spoken to \_\_\_\_\_ about this?**

If someone comes to you with some juicy drama, fight your urge to listen. Listening is just as dangerous as gossiping. Stop the story and ask, "Why are you telling me this?" If the person has not spoken to the person they're slandering, then this exchange must be extinguished. If their gossiping represents a pattern, then you may need to evaluate if you can trust this person. If someone is willing to gossip with you, then they're willing to gossip about you.

Proverbs cuts to the chase by saying, "Whoever spreads slander is a fool" (10:18). You don't want to be a fool, right? Slandering someone doesn't just hurt them; it hurts you, too. Every little piece of drama you share is a crack in the foundation of your friendships. There is a better way to live! Don't share rumors. Share kindness. Don't spread secrets. Spread compliments. Acknowledge her talents. Brag about his accomplishments. Celebrate her creativity. Gossip makes people sink, but kindness makes them soar.

## TALK IT OUT

*Go through these questions with your circle. Be honest. Be open. Talk through the tough stuff.*

Q1: Is gossip prevalent in your school?

Q2: Have you ever found out your friends were gossiping about you? How did that make you feel?

Q3: What can you do when you don't want to gossip, but everyone around you is talking badly about someone?

Q4: Why do you think people like to gossip?

Q5: Why do you think it's so important to God that we refrain from gossiping?

Q6: What's something practical that you can do this week to stop gossiping?

## READING PLAN

*READ THESE PASSAGES IN ORDER EVERY DAY*

Matthew 18:5-6

2 Corinthians 6:14-18

Acts 16:6-10

Luke 6:27-36

Proverbs 14:4-6

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

Hebrews 10:10-11

Do the following with each passage:

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READ– the selected section of Scripture slowly. Take note of the words and phrases that intrigue you, reading them a second time if necessary.

REFLECT– on what grabs you. How does this passage personally relate to your own life and experiences?

RESPOND– to the Scripture. Speak directly to God about what's on your mind and heart. Look for ways to live out what you've uncovered.

## CIRCLE 04/04: **ANGER: FIGHTING WITH FIRE**

Anger. It's the driving force behind some of the most cutting words you've ever heard. Whether it's politicians glowing red in the face during a debate or families spiraling into conflict during a game of Monopoly, anger is a powerful emotion that breaks hearts and unravels relationships. We often think of anger as clinched fists and punched walls, but it goes so much deeper than that.

I am sure many of you would say, "I don't get angry." Bluntly, yes, you do. Maybe you get annoyed when people don't listen to you, so you raise your voice. Maybe you get frustrated when your life feels out of control, so you lash out at your loved ones. Maybe you get upset when you've been wronged, so you seek out revenge. Sure, you don't call it anger. You may call it frustrated, annoyed, agitated, short-tempered, or upset. Still, it's all rooted in the same feeling.

READ: Proverbs 14:29

"People with understanding control their anger; a hot temper shows great foolishness."

The Proverbs are a collection of wise sayings passed down to a younger generation. Each stanza represents the kind of advice a father would give to a son or that an experienced coach would give to his team. Solomon teaches that wise people learn to control their anger. Notice he doesn't say that wise people never get angry. It's just that they have learned to harness their anger. Paul echoes this concept in the New Testament by saying, "In your anger, do not sin" (Ephesians 4:26). Anger isn't a sin. Rather, uncontrolled anger is where the problems arise.

We often think about anger exclusively in a negative light, but the Bible teaches that anger is a characteristic of God (Numbers 11:1-2). When Scripture discusses the anger of God, it's often paralleled with fire. This is an intentional metaphor with a powerful message. Anger, like fire, is constructive when controlled and destructive when uncontrolled.

Without controlled fire, you wouldn't have tacos, road trips, or electricity. When fire is controlled, it cooks, gives us warmth, gives us light, and helps propel a rocket-ship. However, you've also seen the destruction of uncontrolled fire. For example, shockwaves reverberated across the globe when the Amazon burned. A little spark led to destruction on an international scale. Uncontrolled fire kills, harms, and leads to loss.

Let's parallel this principle to our anger. Uncontrolled anger pushes people away, screams things that can never be taken back, destroys relationships, and punches walls. Controlled anger pushes you towards holiness, helps us fight for our loved ones, and helps us understand our core values in life. Controlled anger, like fire, can refine you.

When you feel anger bubbling up inside your gut, you're at a crossroads. You can either control your anger or let it control you. When anger erupts, follow these simple steps:

**One: Delay.**

Simply pause. Hold your tongue. Don't spout off something stupid. Stop before you speak. The first step is often the most complicated, but it's crucial. Reacting slowly will revolutionize your relationship with your feelings. Delay before you say anything.

**Two: Step Away.**

Take a walk. Do something that calms you down. This is not permission to storm out of a room and slam a door. Rather, this is when you actively decide to be different. This is not the same as ignoring someone or giving the silent treatment. Tell the person that you need a chance to collect your thoughts and process your emotions. Then, actually do that. Take a walk, engage with your emotions, or spend a few minutes in meditation.

**Three: Pray.**

It's crucial that you invite God into your feelings. He will empower you to rise above your natural reactions. Pause and pray because there is power in the pause. Prayer fills you with the fruit of the spirit, like love, joy, peace, patience, etc. These God-given virtues will help you react responsibly.

**Four: Convey.**

If you're angry with a person, tell them how you feel. If you're angry with a situation, talk to someone about it after you've taken some time to delay, step away, and pray. Fight your urge to react harshly. Instead, talk about your feelings honestly and thoughtfully. Confession leads to restoration.

As we discussed, anger is like a fire. What is fire often used for? Fuel. Your emotions are healthy. Learn how to make friends with your feelings. As you learn to control and harness your frustrations, it will begin to fuel you forward. Let it compel you to fight for those who cannot fight for themselves. Let it fuel you to become more aware of your emotions and needs. Allow it to break your heart for what breaks God's. Let your natural anger teach you to rise above destructive tendencies.

Allow anger to fuel you towards the future God has for you, your family, and your friends.

## **TALK IT OUT**

*Go through these questions with your circle. Be honest. Be open. Talk through the tough stuff.*

Q1: What actions do you usually take when you get angry?

Q2: How can righteous anger be used for good?

Q3: How can uncontrolled anger be harmful?

Q4: Why is it so important to God that you control your anger?

Q5: What can you do to control your anger?

Q6: What injustice makes you angry? How can you harness that anger to take measures that will make a difference?

## **READING PLAN**

*READ THESE PASSAGES IN ORDER EVERY DAY*

Psalm 25:11-12

Matthew 26:26-28

Matthew 5:5-7

Psalm 145:17-19

Romans 11:29-33

Colossians 1:11-14

Psalm 51:1-3

2 Corinthians 5:17-19

Psalm 51

Do the following with each passage:

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