



conversation peace

THE POWER OF TRANSFORMED SPEECH



mary a. kassian

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WELCOME

Welcome to the revised and updated *Conversation Peace* Bible study! You're about to embark on a learning adventure that will transform your speech from the inside out. *Conversation Peace* will enhance your communication skills and help you improve your relationships one word at a time. Since first published in 2001, this award-winning Bible study has helped tens of thousands of women experience the power of transformed speech.

In this revised edition, you'll get all the great study material from the original workbook . . . plus fresh graphics, new introductions to weekly lessons, and new summaries of conversation themes and the challenges they present. There are extra questions to help you ponder what you've learned, as well as a summary of key application points to help you remember and practice your new communication skills. In addition, we've included space for you to journal and express your thoughts. There's a new website—www.conversation-peace.com where you can download some extra resources, as well as www.lifeway.com/conversationpeace.

At their deepest root, communication problems are spiritual problems. As such, they require spiritual solutions and, for that, we must turn to God. This study presents powerful speech-transforming elements that are based on the Bible. For the final word on how to transform our words, the Bible is our book! It sets a high standard for speech and also for thoughts and attitudes. But even more important, it reveals the secret for how to reach that standard—God's power.

Mary Kassian is an award-winning author, popular speaker, and a distinguished professor of women's studies at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. She has published several books, Bible studies, and videos, including: *Girls Gone Wise*, *In My Father's House: Finding Your Heart's True Home*, and *True Woman 101* and *201*. Mary and her family live in western Canada. The Kassians enjoy their three adult sons and their expanding families (grandkids are awesome!), watching sports, biking, hiking, snorkeling (when they can find some warm water), music, board games, mountains, campfires, and their family pets: "Miss Kitty" and black lab "The Queen of Sheba."



MARY A. KASSIAN

ABOUT THIS STUDY

Do you want to experience the power of transformed speech?

Conversation Peace is an interactive Bible study that includes challenging discussion for small groups. The member workbook provides six weeks of daily, individual study materials for use between sessions.



DAILY LESSONS

The daily lessons, to be completed on your own, should take no more than 20 minutes. Each week's lessons will help you harness the power of a speech-transforming element: the power of navigation, power of cause and effect, power of exchange, power of the open gate, the power of construction, power of instruction, and power of return.



TONGUE TONIC

According to the dictionary, [ton•ic] ton´ik, [Gr. *tonikos*] describes a solution that maintains, increases, or restores the health of the system or organ. The Tongue Tonics explored in this study contain practical concepts and skills to help increase or restore the health of your speech. Whenever you see the symbol, stop and take a dose.



WORD FROM THE WORD

Each Word from the Word defines, explains, and helps you understand how to apply certain words from the Bible. God's Words will stimulate you to think about the way you use words. Study each Word from the Word and watch your vocabulary grow strong and healthy!



QUIPS AND QUOTES

A lot of noted historical and religious persons have said good things about how to use our mouths. Profound, witty, and wise, Quips and Quotes are sure to inspire and challenge you.



BREATH FRESHENER

Freshen your breath by memorizing the Scripture verse for the week. Cut-out cards are available at www.lifeway.com/conversationpeace so you can tuck Breath Fresheners into your purse or pocket.

WEEK 1

THE POWER OF NAVIGATION



“For ‘whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; let him turn from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it.’”

1 PETER 3:10-11, ESV



Where do you want to sail today?

The Greek ferry was on autopilot. Captains are required to man the bridge for the last seven miles approaching port, but he had sailed this route six to eight times a week without incident. Confident of the autopilot settings, the captain took a nap while the first officer and crew left the bridge to watch a soccer match on television. No one noticed when strong undercurrents caused the *MS Express Samina* to drift off course.

Two miles from its destination, the vessel struck a rocky islet and sank. The islet was clearly marked with a light beacon; no attentive seaman would have missed it. But the captain was sleeping, unaware that his autopilot was steering the ship toward disaster. Eighty-two lives, mostly tourists, were lost.

The *Express Samina* was shipwrecked en route to the beautiful Aegean island of Paros. The travelers' exciting and promising vacation ended in unspeakable tragedy and loss. The captain and crew were charged with murder, neglect of duty, and violation of maritime procedures. The disaster was one of the worst nautical accidents in Greece's history.

How foolish of that captain to abandon the helm and neglect the wheel of his vessel. And yet that's precisely what we do when we put our minds and mouths on autopilot and fail to pay attention to the words coming out.

Do you realize that your tongue is a steering mechanism? James 3:4 likens it to the rudder of a ship. Your tongue navigates your ship.

The word *navigate* comes from the Latin words *navis*, meaning *ship* and *agere*, *to drive*. To navigate is to plan, steer, and manage one's movement and course. The apostle James notes that though ships are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. If a ship is not directed, it will be at the mercy of the wind and currents and will be lost or shattered on the rocks.

Do you want your relationships to move in a good direction? To experience the power and blessing of transformed speech?

Where you sail today
depends on what
you say today.

By properly steering your tongue, you will be better able to avoid disaster and direct your life along the right course. And, in the process of harnessing the power of navigation, you'll go to all sorts of beautiful and fascinating places.



DAY ONE

UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF THE RUDDER

The tongue is our principal steering mechanism.

“So also the tongue is a small thing, but what enormous damage it can do. A great forest can be set on fire by one tiny spark. And the tongue is a flame of fire. It is full of wickedness, and poisons every part of the body ... and can turn our whole lives into a blazing flame of destruction and disaster.”

JAMES 3:5-6, THE LIVING BIBLE

I remember the summer my youngest son made his maiden voyage as captain of the fishing boat. This rite of passage happens at about the twelfth year for every Kassian. As instructed, the new captain displays his skill by taking five or six passes close to the shoreline bordering the cabin. Dad, Mom, Grandma, Grandpa, aunts, uncles, siblings, and other spectators in the vicinity shout and cheer. Camcorders whir. Shutters snap. iPhones upload to Instagram.

The highlight of the demonstration occurs when the captain navigates the boat around in a broad circle and pulls back in along the pier. Victoriously, he turns off the motor, docks the boat, and runs ashore to receive his accolades. Passing this test earns him the right to take the small boat out by himself to go fishing in front of the cabin.

Steering a boat is based on a relatively simple concept: the principle of unequal water pressures. When a rudder is turned so that one side is more exposed to the force of the water, the stern (back) of the boat rotates toward the side of the rudder where the water pressure is less.

In small craft the rudder is connected to a handle called a tiller and turned manually. In larger vessels, it is turned by hydraulic, steam, or electrical machinery. In all cases, the rudder is relatively small but is responsible for setting the direction of the entire vessel.

This week we'll study the first element of transformed speech—the Power of Navigation. Just like a rudder, we'll see how our tongues turn our lives in the direction we will go.

Read James 3:2-6. Note the illustrations James uses for the tongue (vv. 3-4): a bit in a horse's mouth and a rudder for a ship. Describe what might happen depending on how each object is used.

OBJECT	USED INCORRECTLY	USED CORRECTLY
Bit in horse's mouth		
Rudder of a ship		

In what ways do these illustrations reflect the situation with our tongues?

James wants us to realize that our tongues are our principal steering mechanism. What we talk is where we'll walk. If we use our tongues for good, we will head in the right direction. Conversely, if we use our tongues for evil, we will steer our ship toward destruction.

THE TONGUE IS A SPARK OF FIRE

In James 3:6, James compares the tongue to a spark of fire that burns down an entire forest. According to James, the tongue sets the whole course of a person's life on fire. In the American Standard Version of the Bible, the phrase "whole course" is translated as "the cycle of nature." The Greek word is *trochos*, which means *genesis* or *beginning*. By using this word, James implied that the tongue is the hub—the beginning—of "the whole round of human life and activity."¹

Below or in the margin, record the first names of some of your family members, friends, coworkers, or neighbors.

Your tongue affects all the relationships you recorded! It is the hub that impacts the whole, complete, or entire circle of your life.

If the hub of a wheel is on fire, the fire can quickly burn in all directions down the spokes to the rim of the wheel. From the burning hub, the entire wheel can be engulfed in flames. James's point is that our tongues play a central, "hub-like" role in our lives. A small spark of evil on our tongue has the capacity to destroy our relationships and even our whole lives.

Sparks remind me of what happened to my older brother, David, who was trying to light a coal barbecue. He tried repeatedly but it wouldn't light. As a final resort, he decided to use gasoline. He did not know that a spark too small to see had, in fact, taken hold in the coals. It didn't let off any noticeable smoke or heat but when David poured gasoline on the coals, the whole barbecue exploded. His burns, to more than 70 percent of his body, were life threatening. Thankfully, by the grace of God, he recovered. But he had to endure excruciating pain and months of rehabilitation.

Not many of you have experienced the pain of badly burned flesh, but many of you have experienced the pain of badly burned relationships. Life has poured gasoline on your coals. The sparks hidden in your tongue and in the tongues of your loved ones have exploded into a destructive fire. The pain—and the rehabilitation—will be lengthy.

STEER IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

How we choose to use our tongues—for good or for evil—affects our entire life. Its use affects the type of person we become and the type of experiences we have.

Read Proverbs 12:5-8,13-22. In the appropriate space, summarize the characteristics and life experiences of those who use their tongues for evil (wickedness) and those who use their tongues for good (righteousness).

USE TONGUES FOR EVIL	USE TONGUES FOR GOOD

Our Breath Freshener for the week (see p. 6) sums up two benefits of controlling our tongues. What are they?

Benefit 1:

Benefit 2:

Like a rudder, our tongues set the direction for our lives. Using them in the right way will bring us blessing. We will love life and see good days.



A word is dead when it is said, some say. I say it just begins to live that day.

—EMILY DICKINSON

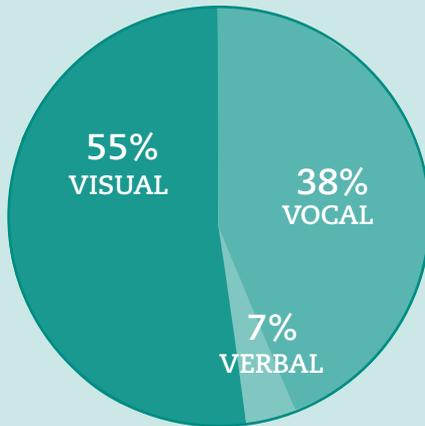
How do you begin to steer your vessel in the right direction? Our Breath Freshener provides a clue: “turn from evil and do good; ... seek peace and pursue it.” To pursue means to chase after. A pursuit requires time, energy, and commitment. Turning, or changing, our words from evil to good also requires time, energy, and commitment. Above all, it requires study to find out what God has to say about how to use our mouths and to ask Him to help us use them in the right way.

Close today’s lesson by praying through and personalizing this week’s Breath Freshener. And don’t forget to take today’s dose of Tongue Tonic, which explains the three parts of a message.



Three Parts of a Message

When we interact with others, the messages we send are made up of three parts: (1) verbal—the words we speak; (2) vocal—the tone of our voice; and (3) visual—our body language.



VERBAL: We express our thoughts with words. Those words can be precise or imprecise, accusing (“You are...”), intense or mild (furious vs. annoyed), vague (“sort of”), pleading or demanding.²

Although words are invaluable in articulating our thoughts and ideas, research indicates that in personal interaction, words only contribute 7 percent to the overall message.

VOCAL: More important than the words we speak is the tone of voice we use. Our voices are incredibly

versatile. We can emphasize certain words; clip, force, or soften words; speak in a lilting, sing-songy, mimicking, or sneering tone; speak rapidly or slowly; over- or under-articulate, raise or lower the volume; and/or change the pitch. The possibilities are endless.

Tone of voice contributes 38 percent to the overall message.

VISUAL: Body language is the final, and most important, part of interpersonal interaction. Again, the possibilities are endless. Consider how these visual cues affect the message: roll eyes, shake, or tilt head, shrug shoulders, frown, purse lips, squint, raise eyebrows, furrow brow, cross arms, glare, sneer, lack of eye contact, rapid blink, glance side to side, point finger, exaggerate arm/hand gestures, tap fingers.

Visual cues contribute 55 percent to the overall message.

All three parts of a message must align and be consistent for the message to be believed. For example, if you say you accept someone, but you say it with a tense voice and crossed arms, chances are he or she won’t believe you. For the message to be clear, all three parts must “say” the same thing.



DAY TWO

LAUNCHING A WARSHIP OR MERCHANT SHIP

The tongue can be used as a weapon or a tool.

“She [The wife of noble character] is like the merchant ships.”

PROVERBS 31:14

When it comes to preparing meals, I’m the practical type. “Fast” and “simple” are the two characteristics of all my recipes. With a house full of boys, “voluminous” and “cheap” were added to my list of menu requirements. On the other hand, my husband, Brent, enjoys spending a Saturday or Sunday afternoon chopping and mixing exotic ingredients in order to sauté, baste, braise, or broil the latest dish featured on his favorite cooking show. (Bam!—throw in some spices and kick it up a notch!)

Often Brent complains about the condition of our kitchen knives. The bargain-store set we received as a wedding gift just were not cutting it (pardon the pun). How could he achieve culinary excellence when his scallions and shallots were getting mulched instead of thinly sliced? His frustration reached such a point that one day I found all my knives, save one, in the garbage can. (Being the practical type, I rescued them.)

For our anniversary, I will give Brent a set of heavy-duty, professional chef knives. They lie in wait on black velvet in a glass-and-aluminum-enclosed case. Just a few moments ago, I opened the case and lightly brushed my thumb against the edge of the largest knife. It’s sharp. An edge like that is certain to cut.

A sharp knife is an essential tool for cooking, but a sharp knife can also be used as a weapon. The same edge can create or kill, depending on how it is used. The Hebrew word *mouth* (*peh*) is often translated *edge*. Like a knife, the tongue has a sharp, powerful edge that can either create or destroy. It functions as a helpful tool or a destructive weapon—depending on its use.

Read Psalm 57:4. Put your creative talents to use and describe or draw what David’s enemies might have looked like.

David's enemies probably carried weapons in their hands, but these weapons concerned him the least. The potential to cut him most deeply were the sharp edges of his enemies' tongues.

According to Psalm 64:3-4, what did David's enemies do with their tongues?

A wound inflicted by the tongue bleeds the spirit more severely than a wound inflicted by the sword bleeds the flesh.



A blow with a word strikes deeper than a blow with a sword.

—ROBERT BURTON

Have you ever felt wounded by the sharp edge of someone's tongue? Have you ever felt ambushed? Attacked? Cut to pieces? I have. People have hurt me deeply with their words. But it's sobering

to realize that my mouth carries the same edge as theirs. It has the same destructive potential.

Connect the verses with the words that describe the destructive power of the tongue.

Psalm 140:3

Lash (NIV) or scourge (NKJV)

Proverbs 16:27

Snare or trap

Proverbs 18:7

Scorching fire

Job 5:21

Deadly arrow

Jeremiah 9:8

Poison of vipers

God wants us to be aware of the potential of our tongues—potential for evil and for good. According to Proverbs 12:18, we use our tongues for evil when we speak recklessly. Reckless words “pierce like swords.” The same verse outlines what happens when we use our tongues wisely, as a tool.

What happens when we use our tongues wisely? (Choose one.)

- The sword chops us up.
- We get a mouth full of dirt.
- We dig our enemy’s grave.
- Our words bring healing.

In the ancient world, swords were the most common weapons of war. The Bible tells us that, during war, the Hebrews would make swords from their plowshares (see Joel 3:10). A plowshare is the cutting edge of a plow—the agricultural tool that cuts furrows in the soil and prepares the ground for planting. When peace returned, the Hebrews hammered the swords back into plows (see Isa. 2:4; Mic. 4:3). The edge that killed the enemy in war was the same edge that helped provide food in peace. The sharp edge had two functions.

Likewise, our tongues can operate in one of two ways: we can declare war and use it to pierce, wound, and kill; or we can use it as an instrument of peace, plowing the soil of our relationships to make them rich and fruitful.

Consider the words that came out of your mouth in the past few days. Were there times you used your mouth as a sword?

- Yes No

Can you think of instances when you used the edge of your tongue in a positive way, to open up the soil of your relationships, helping them become rich and fruitful?

- Yes No

Are you consistently using your mouth as a tool to cultivate a bountiful harvest?

- Yes, I consistently use my mouth as a tool to positively cultivate all my relationships.**
- I am inconsistent. Sometimes I use my mouth as a tool to cultivate, and sometimes I use it as a weapon to harm.**
- No, I often use my mouth as a weapon and have difficulty using it as a tool to improve my relationships.**

LAUNCH THE RIGHT KIND OF SHIP

If you choose to use your tongue as a sword, your relationships will experience perpetual calamity. If you choose instead to put your sword into its sheath (a mark of peace and friendship), pound it into a plow, and till the soil of your relationships, you will reap rich rewards (see Prov. 12:14).

The word *plow* (Latin—*aratio*) literally means, *to open up the soil*. It is closely related to the Anglo-Saxon *ar* from which we derive the English word *oar*—a rudder that plows the sea. As we learned, the tongue is our principal steering mechanism, the rudder that sets the direction of our vessel. Understanding the role of the rudder is the first part of harnessing the power of navigation. Launching the right kind of ship is the second.

In ancient Rome, two types of ships sailed the seas: warships and merchant ships. The merchant ships were large, high-sided vessels with two or three masts that flew square sails. Their primary purpose was to transport grain from Egypt to Italy to feed the expanding Roman population.

The warships were visibly different. They carried dozens of fighting men and were equipped with catapults and ramming rods. Instead of being propelled by wind-billowed sails, the warships were propelled by banks of oarsmen: prisoners and slaves chained under the ship's deck. Compared to the merchant ships, warships were lighter, longer, and more slender—designed for rapid attack and evasive maneuvers.



A sharp tongue is the only edge tool that grows sharper with constant use.

—WASHINGTON IRVING

Will you use your tongue as a sword on a warship or as a plow to fill a merchant ship with nourishing grain? If you have been using your tongue as a weapon, will you ask God to help you pound that sword into a plow? He is faithful to help.



Sending a Message

When a person sends a message, it is encoded—packaged—through his or her personality, emotions, attitudes, assumptions, habits, past experiences, and current environment. A person who is stressed will encode a message differently than someone who is relaxed. A passive person will encode a message differently than an aggressive individual. Someone who values frankness will encode a message differently than one who values tact.

An encoded message is presented behaviorally—through words, tone of voice, and body language. The receiver observes this behavior and decodes the message based on his or her own personality, feelings, attitudes, assumptions, habits, past experiences, and current environment. That is why two people listening to the same speaker can receive two entirely different messages.

The Communication Loop

The process of sending and receiving messages is normally not a one-way street. In person-to-person communication, each individual sends and receives messages simultaneously. As I am talking, I am also observing and decoding your response. As you are observing and decoding my behavior, you are encoding and sending messages with your behavior. Our interaction forms a communication loop.

Eight Potential Problems

In each communication loop, there are eight potential problems. Miscommunication can occur when either person has difficulty encoding his or her message or decoding the other person's message. It can also occur when either person's behavior does not match the intended encoding, or when either person is faulty in his or her observation of the other person's behavior. In an interaction where each person speaks only one sentence, there are 16 ways in which miscommunication can occur!

1. Person A's encoding
2. Person A's decoding
3. Person A's observation
4. Person A's behavior
5. Person B's decoding
6. Person B's encoding
7. Person B's behavior
8. Person B's observation



DAY THREE

SETTING OUT ON COURSE

The chart maps the way of wisdom.

“How much better to get wisdom than gold!
To get understanding is to be chosen rather than silver.
The highway of the upright turns aside from evil;
whoever guards his way preserve his life.”

PROVERBS 16:16-17 (ESV)

Drive past Walmart® until you get to the gas station. Turn left. Drive for about five minutes. When the road curves to the right, look for a green mailbox. Our house is the one with the big black dog in front.

Have you ever tried to follow poor directions? Chances are that somewhere along the way you'll miss a turn and never get back on course. I remember missing a wedding shower when a friend gave me directions that omitted one important turn. After driving around in circles out in the country for an hour-and-a-half, I finally gave up and returned home.

If you want to get where you're going, good directions—or a reliable GPS—are crucial. Thankfully, we're not left on our own to navigate our way through the waters of life. The Bible charts a course for us. The instructions are clear. The directions are good. The prompts are reliable. In the Book of Proverbs, the Bible's route is identified as the way of wisdom.

HOW DO WE KNOW WE ARE ON COURSE?

Proverbs 4:5-27 records what a wise father once told his son about setting out on the right course.

Read this passage in your Bible. Depending on the translation, the words *straight, light, level, and firm* describe characteristics of the way of wisdom. The path of foolishness is just the opposite: *crooked, dark, uneven, and treacherous.*

Read Proverbs 23:15-16. Select the answer that states how the way of wisdom would affect the son's speech:

- He would become a politician.
- He would speak what is right.
- He would malign his enemies.
- He would stop stuttering.

The father would be able to tell if his son were following the way of wisdom by observing the way the son used his mouth. Those who walk in wisdom avoid perverse, corrupt speech. The son's speech would be the primary indicator as to whether or not he was on course.

It's the same with us. Our mouths indicate whether we are on course. If we are steering our vessels the right way, our lips will speak what is right.

Indicate what each verse tells us to do or to avoid in order to navigate the way of wisdom.

Proverbs 3:17

Proverbs 14:5

Proverbs 20:19

Ephesians 5:4

Philippians 2:14

1 Thessalonians 5:11

HOW DO WE FIND WISDOM?

Where can we go to find wisdom? A quick search on the Internet presents all sorts of possibilities—Buddhism, Witch Wisdom, Islam, Kabbalah, Dalai Lama, Metaphysics, ancient philosophers, the Ascended Masters, Lotus Gardens—the list goes on and on.

The advice is often contradictory. In search of wisdom I could shave my head, grow my hair long, wear weird clothes, chant and hum, remain silent, light candles, burn incense, fast, feast, join a commune, meditate in solitude, or become a disciple of numerous spiritual leaders and guides. With all these options, how can we find a source of wisdom that's reliable?

The Bible tells us that there are two types of wisdom: the wisdom that comes from heaven, and a counterfeit wisdom that is “earthly” and “unspiritual” (Jas. 3:13-17).

According to Colossians 2:2-4, where are all the treasures of true spiritual wisdom and knowledge hidden?



Wisdom is oftentimes nearer when we stoop than when we soar.

—WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

What would be the result if the Colossians did not find these treasures? (v. 4)

Let's take a moment to learn more about this source of spiritual wisdom.



[word] A SPECIAL MESSAGE

Word can be defined this way: *the smallest unit of meaningful linguistic communication*. We all know what words are. But do you know that the Bible refers to the Word as a special type of communication from God? In the Old Testament, the term *the Word of God* is used 394 times to identify a message—a commandment, prophesy, warning, or encouragement—God spoke directly to humankind. The term includes the written form of God's message—the Bible. The Bible is called “the Word of God” (Ps. 119). In the New Testament, the term is also used as a name for Jesus: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1, see also vv. 2-18).

God interacts with us by giving us His words written in the Bible. His ultimate act of communication comes through the gift of His Son. Jesus—the Word, the Son of God—“became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). You see, God's Word is His communication to you. Are you listening to His special message?

In 312 A.D., Roman Emperor Constantine the Great was preparing to battle Emperor Maxentius, who had gathered a great number of legions in defiance of Constantine's leadership. Prior to the battle, Constantine saw a powerful vision in the sky: a Chi-Rho symbol in which were emblazoned the words: "In this sign you will conquer."

The *Chi-Rho* is a Christian symbol representing Jesus Christ, with the *chi* and *rho* being the first two Greek letters of Christ's name. Constantine placed this sign on his standards and had it painted on his shields. He won the day with a decisive victory against Maxentius, converted to Christianity, and soon became the sole emperor of the Roman Empire, ending years of political instability.

Constantine is known for granting religious freedom and stopping the persecution of Christians with the Edict of Milan, and for his prominent role at the Council of Nicaea, which countered false beliefs about the Holy Trinity.

The coins used during Constantine's time depict the emperor standing in a ship (representing the empire), holding a banner bearing the *Chi-Rho* symbol. At the rear of the ship, the allegorical female figure "Victory" holds the rudder. The symbolic meaning is plain: with the emperor ruling under the banner of Christ, the empire would be guided in victory along the right path.

As you stand under the banner of Christ, your ship will be guided in victory along the way of wisdom. As you set out on course, resolve to look to Christ, the Source of all wisdom and understanding. The apostle James said, "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously and without criticizing, and it will be given to him" (Jas. 1:5).



"Those who trust in themselves are fools, but those who walk in wisdom will be kept safe."

PROVERBS 28:26



Prime Objective

Why do you talk? Choose all those that apply:

- to demonstrate my superior wit and intelligence
- to get my way
- to vent
- to pass on information
- to qualify for the Ms. Congeniality award
- to conform to social expectations
- to help the plants grow
- to fill air space

Communication goals vary from conversation to conversation. In a business relationship, the goal may be to transmit instructions or directives. At a social gathering, the goal may be to break an awkward silence or to make someone feel welcome. Goals in communication vary, but the prime objective in communication does not.

When **receiving** a message, the prime objective is to understand the message. When **sending** a message, the prime objective is to convey the message clearly.

Some people are afraid to seek understanding because they feel that doing so will signify agreement. Conversely, some people do not feel their messages have been heard until the listener consents to the message. Effective communicators do not make this false association. In every interaction, they make understanding and clarity, not agreement or consent, their prime objective.



DAY FOUR

MANEUVERING THE VESSEL

Maritime rules provide for a safe voyage.

“The tongue has the power of life and death,
and those who love it will eat its fruit.”

PROVERBS 18:21

The first time I snorkeled in the ocean, I felt exhilarated—unlike anything I had ever experienced! An entire new world opened up before me: amber, indigo, and emerald shapes on an iridescent crystal canvas. The sea life was astonishing in shape and variety—Sea Turtles, Raccoon Fish, Long-nosed Butterfly Fish, Gilded Triggerfish, Fantail, Needlefish, Moorish Idol, Little Bitty Yellow Tang—each discovery a new delight. When I released a handful of frozen peas into the water, a shimmering curtain of finned creatures fluttered around me, bumping and nudging to get at the small, green, floating orbs. The coral reef teemed with life!

Sadly, the ocean is also a place of death. The vulnerable are under constant threat. Predators kill smaller and weaker creatures. Swimmers drown. The swell of a hurricane demolishes homes. Storms and squalls capsize mighty vessels or smash them on rocks like toys. Many have suffered, and many have died in the arms of the water’s cruel fury.

THE POWER OF OUR TONGUES

According to Proverbs 18:21, how are our tongues like the ocean?

When we bless others with our words, it is as though we figuratively breathe life into them. When we curse or criticize, it is as though we figuratively cripple and kill them. But the Bible teaches that the power of our tongues is more than just figurative.

Read Matthew 12:36-37. When we stand before God, on what basis will He evaluate us? (Choose one.)

- our good intentions
- our words and speech
- our church attendance
- our charitable giving

All those who come in contact with the ocean should have a healthy respect for its life-and-death power. All of us ought to have a healthy respect for the life-and-death power of the tongue. Failing to respect the tongue's power can lead to a disaster of gigantic proportions.

REGULATING THE TONGUE

I once had the opportunity to ride on the helm of a British Columbia Canada ferry during its crossing from Vancouver to Swartz Bay, the ferry terminal just outside of Victoria. The captain told me that three days earlier, under the command of a different officer, the ferry had collided with a small yacht, killing one man and critically injuring a woman.

The officer had spotted the yacht, repeatedly sounded the horn, and attempted to make radio contact. He followed all the applicable maritime procedures and did everything he possibly could to avoid a collision. But for whatever reason, the driver of the yacht didn't mind the warnings or follow maritime procedures. The consequences were tragic.

Before taking their vessels to sea, captains must be well versed in standard maritime rules. Governing agencies have formulated maritime regulations so that each boater can have a safe, enjoyable voyage. In the same way, God has provided rules and procedures that are intended to make life's voyage safe and enjoyable. God's rules of operation are recorded in the Bible. They are known by various names such as *precepts, statutes, words, ordinances, laws, commands, or ways*.



The strength of a man consists in finding out the way God is going, and going that way.

—HENRY WARD BEECHER

Read what David had to say about God’s regulations:

The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul;
the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;
the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;
the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever;
the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether.
More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.
Moreover, by them is your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.

PSALM 19:7-11 (ESV)

Highlight the adjectives David used to describe God’s regulations. (The first adjective is *perfect*.)

List some benefits of following His regulations.

Other verses outline additional benefits of respecting God and following His commands. Write or draw the nautical symbol that best corresponds with each verse: life preserver, compass, lantern, anchor

Psalms 69:1 Psalm 107:30 Psalm 119:105 Hebrews 6:19

Wise captains realize that regulations are for their benefit, not to unduly restrict them. Therefore, they esteem and appreciate the rules and are careful to follow them. In the same way, God’s standard is not meant to restrict us. James identifies it as “the perfect law that gives freedom” (Jas. 1:25). Just as maritime rules give sailors the freedom to enjoy the sea, so does following God’s rules give us the freedom to enjoy our lives. If we are wise, we will be careful to esteem, appreciate, and follow His ways. Our Word from the Word teaches more about the proper way to communicate.



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THE EMPHASIS BELONGS ON “U”

The Greek word for *communicate* is *koinonia*, which means *to share, partake, have fellowship with, to join together*. It is used in Hebrews 13:15-16: “Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess His name. And do not forget to do good and to share [communicate] with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.” According to this verse, I “share” when I give to others. It is a “sacrifice” because the focus is not on myself but on the other person. In true communication, I am more interested in understanding than being understood, in listening than being listened to, and in giving than getting. I am less interested in me and more interested in you.

So much of what we call communication is self-focused. The emphasis is on the “I.” We com–mun–I–cate. But emphasizing the “I” destroys the correct pronunciation. If I want to speak correctly, I must remember that the emphasis belongs on “U.”

Now that you’ve completed the first four days of week 1, can you identify four ways in which managing your speech compares to navigating a ship? (Hint: see daily lesson titles).

Memorize at least the first sentence of your Breath Freshener (p. 6) and draw on it as you go about your daily tasks. Prepare your spirit for day 5, when you will be asked to evaluate your speech. Ask God to give you openness to seeing your speech from His vantage point.

Today’s Tongue Tonic deals with accepting responsibility. Just as a ship’s captain is responsible for the way he maneuvers his vessel, so you are responsible for the words that come out of your mouth. Demonstrate that you accept responsibility by using “I” statements when you speak.



Own It!

An important step to becoming an effective communicator is accepting responsibility for the part of the communication loop that belongs to you. Don't attempt to control the part that doesn't belong to you. When you expect and demand that someone thinks or behaves the way you want, you claim ownership for a part of the loop that is not yours and enter into a power struggle. The net result is conflict and miscommunication.

Healthy communication can only take place when each person accepts responsibility for his or her own part of the loop (see Matt. 12:36-37). Taking responsibility for your part of the loop means becoming aware of how your personality, feelings, attitudes, assumptions, habits, past experiences, and current environment affect the way you encode and decode messages (see p. 17).

It means carefully observing all the parts of the other person's message—verbal, vocal, and visual—and observing your own behavior to seek to be clear and consistent in the messages you send. Being responsible for your part of the loop means that you bear sole responsibility for what you think and say. No matter what the other person says or does, remind yourself, *I choose how I respond. I am responsible for me.*

“I” Statements

The best way to indicate that you take responsibility for your part of the loop and not for the other person's is to use “I” rather than “you” statements. When you start your thought with “I”—“I think ... I feel ... I see ... I notice ... I assume... I interpret ...”—you demonstrate ownership of your thoughts, feelings, behavior, and interpretations. This decreases the chance that you will come across as judgmental or combative in your speech and increases the other person's receptiveness to your message.



DAY FIVE

TAKING OUR BEARINGS

Tools help determine our position.

“We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check.”

JAMES 3:2

Do you remember the story in this week’s introduction, about the Greek captain who put his ship on autopilot and failed to monitor its direction? The consequences were disastrous. How foolish of that captain to depend on an autopilot setting without periodically checking to ensure that his vessel was staying on course. Yet how often do we do the same thing?

We rely on our tongue’s autopilot setting and fail to check whether we are headed in the right direction.

In today’s lesson, you’ll be answering Twenty Questions to check whether you are on course with God’s plan for your speech. As you do, use the tools God has given you: Listen to your conscience. Consider the feedback you’ve received from others.



When you can’t change the direction of the wind, adjust your sails.

—MAX DEPREE³

You may even want to ask your spouse or a good friend to go through the questions with you. Above all, pray and ask God to show you which you need to make adjustments.



TWENTY QUESTIONS

1. Do you gossip? Do you enjoy repeating the latest news or rumor you heard about another person? (See Prov. 11:13; 20:19; 26:20.)
 never seldom occasionally
 often habitually
2. Do you slander? Do you say things about others behind their backs that you would not say to their faces? Do your words cast others in a less than positive light? (See Ps. 50:20; 52:4; Prov. 11:9.)
 never seldom occasionally
 often habitually
3. Do you nag? Do you repeat your desires and opinions to others until you get what you want? (See Prov. 21:19; 26:21.)
 never seldom occasionally
 often habitually
4. Do you meddle? Do you make the interaction between other people your concern? Do you try to referee arguments or act as a go-between? (See Prov. 26:17.)
 never seldom occasionally
 often habitually
5. Do you brag? Do you seek to present your skills, your experiences or your accomplishments as greater than they really are? (See Prov. 14:23; 25:27; 27:2.)
 never seldom occasionally
 often habitually
6. Do you lie? Are you ever less than truthful? Are you less than totally honest? Do you misrepresent yourself, others, or events? (See Ps. 120:3; Prov. 12:19,22; 26:18-19; Eph. 4:15,25)
 never seldom occasionally
 often habitually
7. Are you quarrelsome? Do you feel a need to be proved right or to have the last word? Do you argue? (See Prov. 17:14; 20:3; 26:21; Phil. 2:14.)
 never seldom occasionally
 often habitually
8. Do you respond in anger? Are you hot-tempered or defensive? Are you easily provoked? (See Prov. 15:1; 29:11,22; Eph. 4:26-27.)
 never seldom occasionally
 often habitually
9. Do you talk too much? Do you babble? Do you spend a lot of time on the phone or in social media? Do you monopolize conversations with your opinions? Do you interrupt? (See Eccl. 10:11; Prov. 15:28; 29:20; Jas. 1:19.)
 never seldom occasionally
 often habitually
10. Are you reluctant to admit you are wrong? Do you fail to ask forgiveness? Do you refuse to admit your error when you feel the other person's error is greater? (See Prov. 29:23; Jas. 5:16.)
 never seldom occasionally
 often habitually

11. Do you betray a confidence? Repeat matters that you should keep private? If someone has failed or injured you, do you feel compelled to tell someone else about it? (See Prov. 6:19; 17:19; 19:11; 25:9-10.)
 never seldom occasionally
 often habitually
12. Do you criticize? Do you find fault? Do you focus on the bad instead of the good? Do you see people's shortcomings more than their strengths? (See Ps. 41:5; Rom. 1:30.)
 never seldom occasionally
 often habitually
13. Do you complain? Do you bewail the circumstances you find yourself in? Do you let others know that you resent being inconvenienced? (See Phil. 2:14.)
 never seldom occasionally
 often habitually
14. Do you make assumptions and assume the worst about other people's motives and intentions? (See Prov. 29:20; 1 Tim. 6:3-4.)
 never seldom occasionally
 often habitually
15. Do you hold grudges? Do you bring up or focus on past wrongs? Do you accuse others? (See Prov. 11:12.)
 never seldom occasionally
 often habitually
16. Are you sarcastic? Do you mock others? Do you use negative humor to put others down? (See Prov. 21:24; 26:18-19.)
 never seldom occasionally
 often habitually
17. Are you malicious? Are your words intended to cut and wound? Are your words harsh? (See Prov. 11:12; 15:1; 16:27; 17:4.)
 never seldom occasionally
 often habitually
18. Are you insincere in your compliments? Do you flatter others for your own advantage? (See Prov. 26:28; 29:5.)
 never seldom occasionally
 often habitually
19. Is your speech filthy? Do you swear or use foul language? Do you use the latest slang or crass expressions? (See Prov. 4:24; 10:31-32; Col. 3:8.)
 never seldom occasionally
 often habitually
20. Do you fail to listen? Do you jump to conclusions before you are sure that you have heard and understood? (See Prov. 18:13; 19:20; Jas. 1:19.)
 never seldom occasionally
 often habitually

Look over your answers and identify three areas in which your speech needs improvement.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

James 3:2 says that when it comes to our speech “we all stumble in many ways.” Nobody stays on course perfectly. But the mark of a good captain is his or her ability to identify when the vessel is off course and to make adjustments. In identifying the areas in which your speech needs improvement, you’re taking the first step toward getting back on course.

Take a moment to pray and ask the Lord to help you get make adjustments in these areas.

HARNESS THE POWER OF NAVIGATION

If you look at a Canadian dime, you’ll see an image of Canada’s most famous sailing vessel, the Bluenose. The Bluenose was constructed strongly to weather the rigorous challenges of North Atlantic fishing but was built also for speed. In 1921, she captured the International Fishermen’s Trophy in a fierce competition between the best schooners in the world. She remained undefeated throughout her eighteen-year career.

The captain of the Bluenose faced the same challenges of every seaman: wind, waves, squalls, storms, sandbars, reefs, and treacherous rocky shorelines; but he knew how to harness the power of navigation to guide his ship to victory. If you follow God’s plan for your speech, you, too, will weather the rigorous challenges of life’s seas, harness the power of navigation, and cross the finish line in victory.

The Twenty Questions helped you take your bearings to identify where your speech needs adjustment. As you read today’s Tongue Tonic, see whether your attitude toward communication also needs adjustment.



Adjust Your Attitude

Humans are not mind readers. Nor are we all-knowing. Adjusting our attitudes to be open to learn from others—even those with whom we disagree—is an important step toward effective communication.

An effective communicator is acutely aware of the complexity of the communication loop, her own limitations, and the potentials for miscommunication. She realizes that she is susceptible to misinterpreting the other person's behavior. She is open to the possibility that she might be wrong or that her behavior might be sending an inconsistent message, so she relies on feedback to confirm or correct the way she is decoding and encoding (see p. 17)

For example, Sally observes Fred speaking to her with a raised voice. Instead of assuming that he is angry, she checks out her decoding by asking: “I notice you are speaking with a raised voice. Are you feeling angry?”

“No,” Fred responds in surprise, “My ears are plugged because I’m getting a cold; I didn’t realize I was raising my voice. I’ll speak more quietly.”

If Sally had not asked for Fred’s feedback, she would have drawn the wrong conclusion. If Fred hadn’t heard Sally’s observation, he would have remained oblivious to how other people were interpreting his behavior. Sally changed her decoding, and Fred changed his encoding and behavior as a result of the exchange. They both learned. (See Prov. 27:17.)

1. Vine, W. E., *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1981), 1078.
2. Based on research by Dr. Albert Mehrabian, UCLA, as cited in Bert Decker, *The Art of Communicating* (Meno Park, CA: Crisp Publications, Inc., 1996), 10-11.
3. John Mason, *Don't Wait for Your Ship to Come In ... Swim Out to Meet It!* (Tulsa, OK: Honor Books, 1994), 63.

WEEK 1

Group Time: Talk It Out

ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY

In order to harness the Power of Navigation, you must step up to the helm. Your challenge is to accept responsibility for what you say and how you say it—to be attentive and intentional about the way you communicate.

The waters you encounter may be choppy. Another person's angry, harsh, or hurtful words may put sharp rocks in your way. But how you respond is up to you. You control the rudder. You are responsible for YOU!

Think about these questions and discuss them with your spouse, family, friends, and/or small group:

- 1. What sort of circumstances trigger you to go “off course” with your speech?**
- 2. With which person(s) do you experience the greatest communication challenges? Why?**
- 3. Would the person you identified say you are more focused on getting your point across or on understanding the speaker? If asked to evaluate your listening and communication habits, what would he or she would say about you?**
- 4. How often do you blame difficult people or circumstances for your sub-par speech? Why is this an unhelpful thing to do?**
- 5. Identify some ways your personality, feelings, attitudes, assumptions, habits, or past experiences might negatively affect the way you communicate.**



