UNWHOLEsome TALK
HONORING GOD IN HOW WE SPEAK

Pre-Game
In the late 1990’s, Reggie White, an NFL superstar and a stand-out Christian, all but ruined his platform as a Christian speaker when he made some insensitive, foolish comments about minority groups. On that day, the words of James 3:6 “The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body” became all too real for Reggie White. As Christians, we face the reality that the world knows us - and judges us - by our words. For us to honor God and influence others, we must pay close attention to the words we use. God doesn’t just want us to give up cursing - he wants our whole attitude and approach to conversations to change in light of his grace and mercy. This study seeks to expose some sources of unwholesome talk in our lives and offer a Biblical perspective on how we can honor God and love others through our conversations.

Theme
Unwholesome talk can take many forms and often points to a bigger sin issue in our lives. We need to allow all of our words to be transformed in light of what Christ has done for us.

Practice
We must identify the root causes of unwholesome talk in our lives and be committed to leaving behind favoritism, a critical spirit and inappropriate conflict management as we seek to honor God with our words.

Symbol Key

† Indicates discussion questions

📖 Indicates Biblical passages to look up

🔗 Indicates application questions to be discussed
I. THE ROOT OF OUR PROBLEM

What do you think counts as unwholesome talk?

Many Christians figure that giving up cursing is all that is required in speaking in a God-honoring way. But is this the case? Scripture deals extensively with how we should speak and reveals that unwholesome talk goes much deeper than 'curse' words.

The Bible includes all of the following as 'unwholesome' talk:

- slander (Psalms 50:20,21)
- gossip (Proverbs 16:28)
- arguing (Philippians 2:14)
- criticizing (Matthew 7:1)
- complaining (Philippians 2:14)
- filthy language (Colossians 3:8)
- boasting (James 4:16)
- lying (Exodus 20:16)

Why should we be so concerned with unwholesome talk in our lives? Unwholesome talk is indicative of a deeper heart issue.

Read Matthew 12:33-37 and James 3:2-6
- When we struggle with unwholesome talk of any kind, what does it indicate?
- Why are words such a big concern in our holiness and obedience?

Understanding how we can leave behind unwholesome talk involves discovering the sins that corrupt our hearts and lead us to unwholesome talk. It is only through dealing with the heart issues that we can honor God with our words.

Look at the list above. What types of unwholesome talk do you struggle with? What heart sins may be behind this?

II. UNWHOLESOme TALK - FAVORITISM

One of the heart issues that fuels unwholesome talk is favoritism - discriminating against others based on external characteristics such as wealth, class, education, looks or race.

What forms of unwholesome talk would favoritism lead to?

\[
gossip = \text{Sharing private information with those who are not part of the problem or solution.}
\]

\[
slander = \text{Using words, tonal patterns or facial expressions to damage someone else's reputation with information that doesn't need to be shared.}
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Read James 1:26-2:13
- What is the connection between true religion, favoritism and our words?
- When we show favoritism through our words and actions, what commandment are we actually breaking?
- On what basis should we not show favoritism to others?

Shamefully, many hurtful, discriminating words have been uttered in the name of Christ against people of different races (slavery in the US), different religions (anti-Semitism), different lifestyles (gay-bashing), different socio-economic classes (health and wealth gospel) and different political views. We, too, risk favoritism every time we preference one type of person (thin, wealthy, Ivy League educated, athletic, attractive, white/black, etc.) through our words. God’s nature stands opposed to favoritism.

Read James 2:9, Romans 2:11 and Ephesians 6:9
- How is our favoritism contrary to the behavior of Christ?

Which groups of people do you tend to show favoritism for or against? How should understanding Christ’s nature help transform your unwholesome talk in this area?

III. UNWHOLESALE TALK - JUDGMENTAL ATTITUDES

Another source of unwholesome talk is a critical or judgmental spirit.

Read Matthew 7:1-6
- What mistake do we make when we are quick to judge / criticize others?
- How can we be more discerning and holy in our words while correcting or giving suggestions to others?

The symptoms of critical attitudes are all too common in Christian circles: kids resent parents, denominations split, spouses become exasperated, coaches demoralize athletes, etc. Christ’s work on the cross destroys all grounds for such attitudes. There are legitimate reasons to make judgments, but even in these times, our attitude must be Christ-life in terms of humility and graciousness.
Read Ephesians 4:29 - 5:2
- What should be the goal of our words, even if we have to critique or judge?
- What is the basis of our compassion and forgiveness of others?
- Can you think of other examples of the redemptive, ethical logic that Paul uses here?

With whom are you most critical: family, teammates, roommates, friends, others?
What are some practical ways you can make sure your talk this person / people is more edifying, compassionate or forgiving?

IV. UNWHOLEsome TALK AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Imagine that your roommate is annoying you or you see a potential sin problem in a friend. What is the first thing you typically do?

Conflict is a reality for all Christians. We need to follow a Biblical process of conflict resolution in order to avoid unwholesome talk.

Read Matthew 18:15-20
- What steps do we need to take when resolving a conflict?
- If we don’t follow this process, where will unwholesome talk likely come in?

Instead of complaining to or involving a third party, we always should go first to the other person when conflict arises. This will help us to avoid slander and gossip. We also should be quick to admit our own fault, forgive others and seek resolution. The goal of conflict resolution is not to get even or prove someone else wrong but is to lovingly bring a peaceful resolution to the problem.

V. POST-GAME

Unwholesome talk can take many forms and often points to a bigger sin issue in our lives. We need to allow all of our words to be transformed in light of what Christ has done for us. As a result, we need to not only leave behind favoritism, a critical spirit and inappropriate conflict resolution, but we also must identify the heart issues that lie behind unwholesome talk in our lives.

To avoid gossip and slander in a conflict, make sure you can say ‘yes’ to these questions before involving anyone else:

1) Have I spoken first to person involved in the conflict?
2) Is this 3rd party part of the problem or solution?
3) Would I feel comfortable saying these same things if the other person where here?