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SESSION 2 | Self-Control and the Tongue

I. INTRODUCTION

“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age,” (Titus 2:11–12).

Self-control is governing your mind, will, and emotions in obedience to God’s word by the power of the Spirit.

“Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O Lord.” (Psalm 139:4)

II. OUR NEED

- Amount of words we speak each day on average: 16,000
- “I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak.” (Matthew 12:36)
- Definition: Self-control is governing your mind, will, and emotions in obedience to God’s word by the power of the Spirit.
- Self-control is more than just saying ‘no’ to appetites and desires; it also refers to a soundness of mind and judgment
 - “Sound judgment is critical to the exercise of self-control. It enables the godly person not only to distinguish good from evil, but also to sort out the good and the best. Sound judgment enables us to determine the boundaries of moderation...helps us regulate our thoughts and keep our emotions under control.” –Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Godliness*, 133
- For speech, we need not only to say ‘no’ to our impulses and appetites to damaging speech but also understand how to sort out “the good and the best”.

- “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; *he will surely do it.*” (1 Thessalonians 5:23–24)

III. WORDS CAN DESTROY

- If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water. (James 3:3-12)
- “It would be an awful experiment to set a house on fire, intending to let it burn just so much and no more. Can you say to the fire, ‘This far you shall come and no farther?’ Sin quickly grows from a pygmy to a giant, and ever increasing in its awful power, it crushes down the man who is in its grip and holds him under his awful sway.” -Spurgeon
- Common Traps
 - Lying
 - a) “Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices” (Colossians 3:9)
 - Complaining
 - a) “Do all things without grumbling or complaining” (Philippians 2:14)
 - Boasting

- a) “May the LORD cut off all flattering lips, the tongue that makes great boasts, those who say, “With our tongue we will prevail, our lips are with us; who is master over us?” (Psalm 12:3-4)
 - Gossip & Slander
 - a) “With his mouth the godless man would destroy his neighbor, but by knowledge the righteous are delivered. (Proverbs 11:9)
 - Perverse Speech (i.e. sarcasm, swearing, degrading, etc.)
 - a) “Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.” (Ephesians 4:29)
 - Unloving, Unkind, Joyless Speech
 - a) Word to parents
 - b) Word to children
 - New category of unspoken “talk” online
 - a) Need for self-control in what we post, text, ‘like’
 - b) Need for caution in what we read and consume
- “Many of the problems we experience when talking with one another emerge from the fact that we have usurped the authority of God: We say what we want to say, when and how we want to say it. We speak as if we are in charge and as if we have the right to use words to advance our purpose, and to achieve what would make us happy.” Paul Tripp, *War of Words*, 20-21.

IV. WORDS CAN BUILD UP

- We get to honor the Lord with our words
 - “May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.” (Psalms 19:14)
 - “Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ...” (Ephesians 4:15)
 - “And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” (Colossians 3:17)
- We get to care for others with our words
 - ‘Say to those who have an anxious heart, “Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you.”’ (Isaiah 35:4)
 - “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works” (Hebrews 10:24)

- “And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.” (1 Thessalonians 5:14)
- “Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.” (Romans 12:15)

- “So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. **Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.** (1 Thessalonians 5:6–11)

- “Speaking in a way that serves the needs of others is at the heart of God’s will for us, and his enabling grace makes it possible.” Paul Tripp, *War of Words*, 209

V. NEED FOR SELF-CONTROL

- “Men may talk of self-control, as if the reins were in his own hand. But he who has been born of the Spirit, and taught ‘to know the plague of his own heart,’ is made to feel that effective self-control is divine grace and not his own native power. . . **Have not repeated defeats taught us the need of calling in better strength than our own?**” – Charles Bridges, *Proverbs*, 483-484

- “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, *training us* to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live **self-controlled**, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.” (Titus 2:11–14)

- “Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips!” (Psalm 141:3)

- There is pleasure and life to be found in taming our tongues

- “Gracious words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body.” (Proverbs 16:24)
- Practical Steps: How do we learn self-control in our speech?
 1. Gain a conviction about words
 - a. Consider a study through Proverbs or James on speech and the power of the tongue
 - b. *War of Words: Getting to the Heart of Your Communication Struggles* by Paul David Tripp
 2. Evaluate your words
 - a. What are you saying?
 - b. How are you saying it?
 - c. Get help in your assessment: spouse, kids, coworkers, community group, roommate, friends
 3. Identify your most common temptation with your words
 - a. Complaining? Lying? Criticism? Boasting?
 - b. Identify trends of when, with who, reason
 4. Make a change
 - a. What will you say instead?
 - b. Find a phrase or a category (thankfulness, gracious, patient) that you’re going to fight to replace that one common temptation with.

“As the Hebrews were promised the land, but had to take it by force, one town at a time, so we are promised the gift of self-control, yet we also must take it by force.” -Ed Welch, *Self-Control: The Battle Against “One More”*, The Journal of Biblical Counseling, 30.