

Mouth PEACE:

YOUR INSTRUMENT FOR HARMONY IN THE CHURCH (OFFICE)

by Beth Beutler

"O H, for a thousand tongues..."

Would we really want that? If we were only to sing our great Redeemer's praise, then let's have them! However, one mouth can get us in enough trouble, can't it?

James says our tongue is a fire. My pastor recently spoke on that passage, and shared that James does not attempt to give us action steps to control our tongue. He simply paints a picture of how powerful the tongue is. He said the way James portrays it is like the driver's education film that many of us have seen—you know, the one that gruesomely portrays the destructive power of a vehicle? There's not much that needs to be said afterward—the film speaks for itself.

So it is with our mouths. Everyone has one, and the mouth is a significant tool in everyday life. In many ways, it is essential to life. It has the power to build up and the power to destroy. How

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many churches have seen relationships explode because of the power of the mouth? How much damage has been done because of a thoughtless comment? James tells us, "If you claim to be religious, but don't control your tongue, you are just fooling yourself, and your religion is worthless." (James 1:26 NLT) That's a pretty strong statement. Wonder what he would say to church staff?

As ministry employees, we have a mouthpiece that should be an instrument for harmony in the church office and with the congregation. Perhaps it should be called a mouth "peace." How can we make sure it is used most often for the good of those around us? Here are a few guidelines:

FIRST, OUR MOUTH SHOULD BE AN INSTRUMENT OF

P – Praise. We are created to bring glory to our Father, and we most often do this via our mouths. When we regularly fill our mouths with praise, we leave less room for negative speech. Think of it this way: when you chew gum, or suck on a mint, you usually refrain from putting anything else in your mouth. So it is with praise. When your mouth is filled with sweet praises, there's no room for anything else! David wrote, "I will praise the Lord at all times, I will constantly speak His praises." (Psalm 34:1 NLT) When we are constant about praising, we have less chance of sinning with our mouths.

Praise comes from what is inside us. What are you filling yourself with? James reminds us how easily we can be inconsistent: "Sometimes it praises our Lord and Father, and sometimes it

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breaks out into curses against those who have been made in the image of God. And so blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth. Surely, my brothers and sisters, this is not right!" James 3:9–10 (NLT) If we remain "full of praise," we can become more consistent.

SECOND, OUR MOUTH SHOULD BE AN INSTRUMENT OF

E – Encouragement. We should be coming alongside someone, putting an arm around a shoulder, and speaking uplifting words. How have you encouraged someone today? How have you been encouraged today? I'm not suggesting the syrupy, sweet nothings that seem to come out of some mouths with no thought behind them. I'm talking about sincere, well-thought encouragement that truly affirms someone's spiritual growth, gifts, and relation-

ships. Proverbs 16:24 tells us, “Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.” Have you spoken some pleasant words to one of your co-workers today?

In her book, *Conversation Peace*, Mary Kassian shares a way to “ACE” affirmation. She suggests

Action: Affirm a praiseworthy behavior, be specific

Character: Identify the character trait the action shows

Effect: be specific about the effect the action had on you.

For example, “Margaret, thanks so much for setting up lunch for our meeting today. Your attention to detail was evident. We had a wonderful time of fellowship before the meeting began and I always feel so well taken care of when you are in charge of set-up.”

THIRD, OUR MOUTH SHOULD BE AN INSTRUMENT OF

A – Authenticity. Are you equally honest and genuine, no matter who you are with? Do people know you for your integrity? These are hard questions. We are in the habit of wearing masks, often portraying ourselves as something we are not. I’m not suggesting that we bare our souls to everyone who walks by; however, anyone who knows us should be able to see a consistent set of values and beliefs—character traits—that drive us. They should know that we are not in the habit of exaggerating (yes, that’s lying) or telling white-truths (yes, that’s lying) or misleading people by omitting important information, (yes, that’s lying) or not speaking up when we should (yes, that’s lying.)

Authenticity also involves love, so when truth needs to be spoken, it should be spoken in love. Authenticity is not rudeness or bluntness, as in “I’m just being honest,” but rather a real, gen-

uine concern for people that has their best interests in mind and will speak in honest, yet loving ways to them. Ephesians 4:15 instructs us to be “speaking the truth in love.” Truth and love go hand in hand.

Proverbs 12:19 (NLT) tells us, “Truth stands the test of time; lies are soon exposed.” Does your mouth help you “stand the test of time?”

FOURTH, OUR MOUTH SHOULD BE AN INSTRUMENT OF

C – Confidentiality. Sad to say, I’ve flubbed up on this one. I remember another couple of “opportunities to get in trouble.” God used these greatly to finally get across to me that I must improve in this area before I could be trusted with more responsibility in His ministries. In college, I was caught passing along the latest gossip and the Dean of Women called me into her office. (I was usually the “good girl” so being called into the Dean of Women was a big deal.) She encouraged me to learn to control my speech by asking myself, Is it true? Is it kind? Is it necessary? I can’t say that I’ve always lived by those questions, but they are a wise guideline. Then there was that time... oh never mind. Suffice to say, I had to get a handle on this before God could use me in positions of more responsibility in His kingdom!

In a church office setting, we have a particular responsibility with confidentiality. We see and hear many things that are of a personal nature and we

must learn to be discreet. We are tempted to savor the power of knowing something others don’t know. Somehow, it makes us feel special. Just remember though, that someone else could someday have your job, and you will be out of the loop. That doesn’t make you any less special than they are. It’s just that for now, you have a role that allows you to be “in the know.” It is your responsibility to guard the information.

Confidentiality goes beyond just keeping something secret when you’ve been asked to keep it to yourself. As you mature in discretion, you’ll begin to decide for yourself the times that details do not need to be shared. (Think again of the “Is it necessary?” test.) As you improve over time with the help of the Lord, you will see people begin to trust you more and more. Interestingly, when it becomes less important to you to know everything, you may start knowing more!

One warning sign of lack of discretion is chattering. Proverbs 20:19 tells us, “A gossip betrays a confidence; so avoid a man who talks too much.” The more words that we speak, the more opportunity we have for dangerous slip ups.

LAST, OUR MOUTH SHOULD BE AN INSTRUMENT OF

E – Equipping. Nearly every area of ministry requires the use of our mouths, with a few exceptions. Singing in the choir or playing in the orchestra, teaching Sunday School, providing

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personal care and visits, praying with others and a host of other outreaches require some form of communication with our mouths. We have all been given this tool to use to equip others to bring glory to God. We work together to build up the body, which ultimately glorifies the creator.

We experience several distractions that keep us from equipping. We think we lack expertise, or we don't know what to say (Moses tried that excuse—look at Exodus 3:11–12) or we fear speaking in front of a group. That one is one of the biggest fears many people have (even over death). Isn't it interesting that Satan, who loves to use lies and fear, attacks people in an area that could be most used to equip others? Do you think that is a coincidence?

When I examine where the fear of speaking comes from, I have to admit it is rooted in selfishness. We worry about what people will think if we mess up, so often we will decline opportunities to speak and share. But think about it this way. The audience is eager for you to do well. Most of them have come expectantly and are supportive of you. They will even be patient with some flaws, especially if you are able to laugh at them yourself. So, uproot the pride and use your mouth to equip people when God opens doors of opportunity. (Notice I did not say to force yourself on people!) Ask if you can try something new in an equipping fashion.

Sometimes, the best way to use our mouthpiece is not to use it at all. Here's a list of times when it may be best to "keep your mouth shut!" (author unknown):

- **In the heat of anger** – Proverbs 14:17 (NLT): Those who are short-tempered do foolish things, and schemers are hated.
- **When you don't have all the facts** – Proverbs 18:13: What a shame, what folly, to give advice before listening to the facts!

- **When you haven't verified the story** – Deuteronomy 17:6: But never put a person to death on the testimony of only one witness. There must always be at least two or three witnesses.
- **If your words will offend a weaker person** – 1 Corinthians 8:11: So because of your superior knowledge, a weak Christian, for whom Christ died, will be destroyed.
- **When you are tempted to make light of holy things** – Ecclesiastes 5:2: And don't make rash promises to God, for he is in heaven, and you are only here on earth. So let your words be few.
- **When you are tempted to joke about sin** – Proverbs 14:9: Fools make fun of guilt, but the godly acknowledge it and seek reconciliation.
- **If the issue is none of your business** – Proverbs 14:10: Each heart knows its own bitterness, and no one else can fully share its joy.
- **When you are tempted to tell an outright lie** – Proverbs 4:24: Avoid all perverse talk; stay far from corrupt speech.
- **If your words will damage someone else's reputation** – Proverbs 16:27: Scoundrels hunt for scandal; their words are a destructive blaze.
- **If your words will damage a friendship** – Proverbs 16:28: A troublemaker plants seeds of strife; gossip separates the best of friends.
- **When you are feeling critical** – James 3:9: Sometimes it praises our Lord and Father, and sometimes it breaks out into curses against those who have been made in the image of God.
- **If you can't say it without screaming it** – Proverbs 25:28: A person without self-control is as defenseless as a city with broken-down walls.
- **When you are tempted to flatter a wicked person** – Proverbs 24:24: A judge who says to the wicked, "You are innocent," will be cursed by many people and denounced by the nations.

- **When you are overly enjoying being the center of conversation or love to hear yourself talk** – Proverbs 10:19: Don't talk too much, for it fosters sin. Be sensible and turn off the flow!
- **When you are only going to be negative** – 1 Thessalonians 5:19: No matter what happens, always be thankful, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.

An article appeared recently in *TIME* magazine about Ashley Smith, who shared her faith with accused rapist and murderer Brian Nichols when he put her at gunpoint. Instead of letting fear overtake her, she used her mouth for peace. She made a huge difference in both of their lives by talking and listening, giving a chance for amazing grace to shine through. That's what it means to use our "mouth PEACE." You can almost hear the Lord say,

"Now THAT'S what I'm talkin' about!"

Will He say that about you? 