

# American Decency Association

PO Box 202, Fremont MI 49412 231-924-4050 www.americandecency.org  
Encouraging Christians to guard their heart February 2026

## Is your tongue full of life or death?

by Steve Huston



*“Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof.”* (Prov. 18:21)

Throughout the book of Proverbs, Solomon has much to say about the tongue and its use; our key verse pretty much sums it up, though. With February in mind, let’s focus on this fact: the life and death of relationships, both earthly and eternal, are found in the power of the tongue. Pay attention to the wise man; we will eat the fruit of our words – the terms and tones, word habits and the emotion behind the messages of our tongue – we cannot escape their fruit. We will either eat the sweet fruit of love, growth, and life or the bitter fruit of disdain, decay, and death. This is true for romantic relationships;

family, church, and work relationships; friendships; the community at large (as we build a name for ourselves); and even our relationship with God in how we respond to Him.

Warnings, encouragement, and examples are found all throughout Scripture regarding our words. We must take heed to them; here are but a few examples:

James 3:8-10 “But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, **these things ought not so to be.**”

In Luke 6:45, Jesus teaches that one’s words come from the overflow of his heart. What is our heart full of? Grace and truth? Selfishness and deceit? Love or disdain? As we look objectively at our words, not excusing them, we will better see

what resides within.

That doesn’t mean that we are never to speak words of judgment or critique, but we are to be aware of what motivates our speech and to be sure that our words are always spoken “with grace, seasoned with salt.” (Col. 4:6) We would do well to remember that our tone needs to be included in that sprinkling of salt. I cannot tell you how often I heard these needed words from my precious mother, “Steve, it’s not *what* you said, *it’s how* you said it.”

As we deal with others, might we be sure that we do so patiently and that it’s a handling of Scripture, not just a matter of our personal preferences. Paul reminds us of this in 2 Timothy 4, as he calls us to use our words to reprove, rebuke, and exhort **with all longsuffering and doctrine.**

As we look again at our key verse, another description that James gives of the tongue comes to mind; it is a fire (James

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As we look again at our key verse, another description that James gives of the tongue comes to mind; it is a fire (James



3:6). How well we know the power of fire for death or life: Uncontrolled it brings great destruction and death; under control it provides heat for warmth and for cooking, thereby its power is used for life. So also, “Death and life are in the power of the tongue.” Uncontrolled, it too brings all manner of devastation, particularly to relationships. Controlled, the tongue can effectively share the gospel, build up others, build bridges of friendship, and strengthen one’s reputation, bringing aspects of life in increasing measure.

In dealing with relationships, it’s been said that we make deposits and withdrawals, and it’s our words that are most often the currency that is tendered. Counselors are quick to remind us that one withdrawal (harsh or angry words and actions) requires six or seven deposits (words or actions of genuine kindness, love, helpfulness, caring, etc.) to break even. Even then,

habitual blowing up will wreak havoc on a relationship regardless the number of deposits made.

Our words, including our tone, often serve to define us in the eyes of others; what kind of character and reputation are you building? Although my mother would often warn, “Actions speak louder than words,” frequently words and actions go hand in hand even as faith and works are meant to be life partners. As words are our relational currency, what kind of reputation are you buying?

As you dump words in the ears of others like spare change in a coffer, are you seen as a gossip who tears others down or one who builds up another who may be struggling, whether they are around or not? Are you leaving a trail of anger and frustration in the wake of your words or are you building a reputation for being loving, gentle, patient, and content? Have you tendered a character whereby you’re known as a careless liar or as a truth teller who searches out a matter before speaking? Does grumbling or

gratitude best define your general demeanor?

How interesting that our key verse of warning is bookended between friends (v. 19) and one’s “wife”/spouse (v. 22), thereby indicating that the power of the tongue affects all our relationships. With wisdom, let’s follow the exhortation of that children’s song: “O, be careful little tongue what you say!”

“Even a child is known by his doings,” but the spirit of man is frequently found in his words. If we can rejoice always, in everything give thanks, and set our hearts to praise, praise, PRAISE, we will build a character worthy of being followed as an example and one that is looked upon with delight by God.

*To bless God for mercies—is the way to increase them.*  
*To bless Him for miseries—is the way to remove them.*  
 ~ William Dyer



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